

THE AFFECTIVE POLITICS OF HOME: QUEER FAMILIAL IMAGINATIONS IN
20TH AND 21ST CENTURY CHINESE THEATRE AND FILM

A Dissertation

Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School

of Cornell University

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

by

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August 2013

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The Affective Politics of Home: Queer Familial Imaginations in 20th and 21st

Century Chinese Theatre and Film

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Cornell University, 2013

This dissertation studies representative queer texts across various media (literature, theater and cinema) in relation to the changing melodramatic and sentimental modes of representations of home throughout 20th and 21st century China. Depictions of home in modern China are often expressed through these modes; the aesthetics of these modes concerns the ontological question of loss in China's coerced passage into modernity. This melancholic loss is often associated with the constructions of "Chineseness"—cultural attempts to anchor, in the words of Rey Chow, "a non-Western but Westernized" Chinese identity. This project seeks to understand how queerness, as sites of affective excess indicating unresolved social contradictions, intervenes the melodramatic or sentimental tendency towards ideological closures, which secure orthodox Chinese identities. This project identifies four geo-historical sites that provide historical conditions of possibility for queerness to emerge in relation to the notion of home and family. My geo-historical sites of analysis are Republican China, post-Martial Law Taiwan, post-Socialist China and contemporary Taiwan and China. For Republican China, I analyze the case of Ouyang Yuqian and explore his committed theatre career of female impersonation. Through a study of the affective exchange between him and his fans, I demonstrate how this dimension allows him to go beyond the familial ideologies in 1910s family

melodramas and 1920s Nora plays, which led him to create Nora plays that entailed queer desires. For post-Martial Law Taiwan and post-Socialist China, I choose to study the first visible queer texts--in Taiwan, *Crystal Boys* and Tian Chi-yuan's queer theatre by situating them in the dominant structure of feelings of melancholia and *ressentiment*; in China, I explore queerness in *East Palace, West Palace* and Lin Yingyu's adaptation of Jean Genet in relation to the affective politics in dominant root-searching and scar literature movements. From the contemporary moments, I study two self-identified queer activists/independent filmmakers' works—Mickey Chen from Taiwan and Cui Zi'en from China, analyzing how the sentimental or melodramatic mode is deployed in their works. I select those texts for their representativeness as the first queer texts or significant examples that allow us to see the cultural politics of the specific spatial-temporal sites I chose for analysis. This project demonstrates that, in order to understand queerness in 20th-century China, one needs to engage with the afterlives of Confucian familialism, through which Chineseness has been repeatedly constructed to counter the melancholic loss of modernity.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Jen-Hao Walter Hsu completed a B.A. in Western Languages and Literatures and an M.A. in Theatre and Drama at National Taiwan University. He worked as a research assistant at the Institute of Chinese Literature and Philosophy at Academia Sinica, Taipei and won a national scholarship from the Ministry of Education in Taiwan for Ph.D. studies in the U.S. Before matriculating at Cornell, he studied for two years at the Ph.D. program in Theatre and Performance Studies at UCLA, where he was also awarded with a Global Scholarship. His research interests look at the intersections between the visual/affective politics in film/theatre and the changing regimes of sexuality in modern and contemporary China and Taiwan. He is also a part-time translator.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank the many people, organizations, and institutions who have made this work possible. The preliminary research of this project is funded by Academia Sinica, where I completed the drafts of my first two chapters. The completion of this dissertation is further made possible with the aides of the Sage Fellowship, dissertation writing group, and reading group of Institute of Comparative Modernity, funded by various institutes at Cornell University. The research on Cui Zi'en in the last chapter is strengthened after his visit at Cornell, a screening event facilitated and funded by PMA, EAP, and Center for LGBT and FGSS studies at Cornell.

The theoretical framework of this dissertation evolves from, “Queering Chineseness: Queer Sphere of Feelings in *Farewell My Concubine* and *Green Snake*,” an article published in *Asian Studies Review*, 36.1 (2012), copyright Taylor & Francis, LTD. My thanks to the editors and peer reviewers of that article, especially Peter Jackson, for all of their great and insightful feedback, which has influenced the contour of this dissertation.

Finally, I would like to thank all the people who have assisted my research, and who have read parts of this dissertation, offering criticism, feedback and impact along this process. My gratitude, especially, to Amy Villarejo, Petrus Liu and Brett de Bary, who have provided invaluable guidance and feedback that have shaped the foundation and final contour of this dissertation. I benefited the most from the conversations with David Wang from Harvard; Sabine Haenni and Naoki Sakai from Cornell; Peng Hsiao-yen from Academia Sinica; Shu-mei Shih, and Sue-Ellen Case from UCLA; Katherine Huiling

Chou from National Central University in Taiwan and the professors and peer at the Workshop in Global Performance at UCSB organized by Suk-Young Kim. I would like to thank my colleague at Cornell and various places in the world for stimulating my thoughts about the nature of humanity and sustaining my passion for intellectual endeavors. I would like to thank Professor An-yi Pan, Ozum Hatipoglu, Marcie Middlebrooks, Arina Rotarou and other colleague from Cornell; Cheenghee Masaki Koh and Yijie Chou from University of Chicago; Ying-cheng Peng and Julia Grimes from UCLA; Hsiao-wen Cheng from Academia Sinica for giving me support and encouragement when I was going through moments of crisis in this long journey. Last but not least, my heart-felt gratitude to Xiaoyan Liu and my beloved family, Wen-sui Hsu, Yu-Hsiang Chang, and Jen-Han Hsu, without whom I cannot carry through and surface from this final round of challenge. Home is where the heart is. The greatest harvest of this dissertation process for me is to know what human feelings might entail with regard to our deepest and universal longing for “homecoming.”

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INTRODUCTION

QUEERNESS AND MODERN CHINESENESS

On May 14th, 2009, a Taiwan-based theatre troupe, the Creative Society, successfully put on the debut performance of a new production—*He is my Wife, He is my Mother*, a queer play adapted from Qing literatus Li Yu's homoerotic vernacular story, *A Male Mencius Mother*. Marketed as a play about “love between tongzhi,”¹ *He is my Wife, He is my Mother* capitalizes on the sensational value of its queer components, as the show's description praises Li Yu as a late-Ming-early-Qing eccentric talent whose “language provokes and shocks” (語不驚人死不休).² From Li Yu's story to Katherine Huiling Chou's³ play, a history of Chinese homosexuality is rescued from oblivion. Now we know that queer life is not an imported concept from the West, but rather a way of life already existing in early modern China when Western influences were still pretty miniscule. The advertising strategy underscores such a culturalist logic, aiming to draw *tongzhi* communities into the theatre. After all, it is 2009, when self-identified *tongzhi* communities in Taiwan have already been established and consolidated since the ongoing queer rights movement began in 1990.⁴ The historiographical impulse in *He is my Wife, He is my Mother* thus constructs a history of Chinese male homosexuals, imagining a

¹ In the advertisement section on the website of Taiwan's national theatre, the play is described as “a 17th century strange love among tongzhi (literally meaning comrade; it is the Chinese term for queer).” <http://www.ntch.edu.tw/program/show/40408e951e72c9b4011e740657f70041?lang=zh> (accessed on Dec 3, 2012)

² Ibid.

³ She is both the playwright and director of this play.

⁴ The establishment of the lesbian group “Womenzhijian” (Between Us) on February 23, 1990 is considered to be the inception of the tongzhi movement in Taiwan. For more historical accounts from 1990-2001, see Huiqiu Zhuang and Erge, *Yan qi cai hong qi: wo de tong zhi yun dong jing yan, 1990-2001* (Taipei Shi: Xin ling gong fang wen hua shi ye g fen you xian gong si, 2002).

historical continuation of “the way of male love.”

I argue, however, that from “the way of male love” to a “tongzhi love story” is not simply a matter of historical continuation. Rather, historically speaking, this genealogy has gone through an epistemic change, in which male love as a mode of affective relation has been transformed into male love as the basis of sexual identity; that is, to borrow Foucault’s phrase, Li Yu’s story of male love paves the way for a Chinese homosexual to “become a personage, a past, a case history.”⁵

The anachronism of the Creative Society’s misappropriation, nevertheless, provides us with a lens to see how contemporary Chinese queer culture finds its cultural identity via the redefinition of Chinese cultural tradition. In localizing queerness, we might ask what culturally specific issues does Chinese queerness need to grapple with? In analyzing the adaptation strategies of *He is my Wife*, *He is my Mother*, I hope to elucidate a cluster of issues concerning the preoccupation of Chinese queer expressions with the question of “home.”

Home, as the primary space where one forms a sense of oneself in relation to one’s intimate others, has also been a preoccupation of Western melodramas. Scholarship has pointed out how U.S. cinematic queer expressions are indebted to the conventions of Hollywood family melodramas. Given that Hollywood family melodrama stages the Oedipal script of gendered and sexualized identities in a bourgeois nuclear family setting, queer expressions, not surprisingly, need to meddle with these structures of fantasy and

⁵Michel Foucault, *The history of sexuality* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978), 43.

desire in order to imagine deviant sexual possibilities.⁶ Similarly, in the Chinese context, queer expressions are often bound up in their entangled relationships with the family. Nevertheless, while their Western counterparts are busy with finding the relevance of or deviance from the Oedipal trajectory, Chinese queer expressions often engage with the extended kinship structure that stems from Confucian familialism, an ideology that holds the ethical and political orders together in pre-modern China. This familial matter becomes even more complicated when China enters the modern world order as a consequence of imperial coercion. The sense of urgency and precariousness that comes along with this coercion also takes its toll on Confucian familialism. If Confucian familialism presupposes a political order that is hinged on a continuum, one that runs from the individual, to the family, to the state, and finally to the universe, then how the family should figure in China's reorientation in the midst of political turmoil—and moreover, what role it should play--becomes a central preoccupation in modern Chinese cultural psychology. Therefore, to account for how queer expressions form relationships with the familial in the context of modern China, one should always put the question of traumatized national identity into consideration. The case of Chou's adaptation of Li Yu's text is such an example.

Confucian Familialism and/or Queer Diaspora

⁶ For discussions about how gay directors, such as Todd Haynes and Fassbinder, appropriate the melodramatic conventions to express a queer sensibility, see John Mercer and Martin Shingler, *Melodrama : genre, style, sensibility* (London; New York: Wallflower, 2004), 60–77.

As I've stated above, *He is my Wife, He is my Mother* is a theatrical adaptation of Li Yu's vernacular story *A Male Mencius Mother*. Collected in the anthology *Silent Dramas*, *A Male Mencius* tells the story of "strange love" between Xu Jifang and Yo Reilang, a couple of homosexual lovers from the Mingnan (the southern part of Fujian) area in the Qing dynasty. In the fashion of meta-commentary prevalent in Ming-Qing vernacular stories, Li Yu embeds quite a significant portion of his moral judgments on the "strangeness" of the story in the narrative. He invites his readers to this tale by capitalizing on its "strangeness," while alluding to Confucian moral codes to justify his poetic license:

In what dynasty did Nanfeng⁷ originate? Who invented this particular way of male love, which is still in vogue today? It competes with the orthodoxy of male-female eroticism. Male-female eroticism is mandated by Heaven and Earth; it is as natural as how the male and female bodies are respectively shaped. Isn't it strange that the way of male love can compete with this orthodox?....Today, I will tell you the story between a talented young man and a fair boy. They are so fond of the way of male love that they even become husband and wife. They even become virtuous husband and wife to each other. This is a variation of the Three Principles and the Five Doctrines (sanganwuchang 三綱五常).⁸ Orthodoxical histories cannot record this strange tale but unofficial history should definitely bear it. Let me begin this tale to open up your sleeping eyes.⁹

⁷ It literally means, "wind from the south." In Chinese pronunciation, nan can also mean "male." Therefore, Li Yu is playing with a pun, suggesting that this particular way of male love also comes from the south.

⁸ This is the basic structure of Confucian ethics. The three principles define the power relationships between three ethical categories, namely ruler/subject, father/son, and husband/wife; the five doctrines refer to five moral feelings that bind human relationships together.

⁹ Yu Li, Heimut Martin and Riben zun jing ge wen ku, *Wu sheng xi : [12 hui]* (Daibei: Jin xue shu ju : fa xing chu Gu ting shu wu, 1969). All Chinese translations are mine unless specified.

Naming this tale *A Male Mencius Mother*, Li Yu obviously makes allusion to the story of *Mencius Mother Moves Three Times*, a canonical tale in Confucianism defining motherly virtues and their importance in maintaining Confucian familialism. The tale can be summarized as follows: in order for Mencius to grow up morally sound and upright, his mother moves three times, first to a neighborhood nearby a graveyard, and then from there to one in the city center, and eventually to one right next to a school. This story emphasizes the importance of a nurturing environment and education, an aspect of personal development that is tied to maternal moral obligations. The male Mencius mother in Li Yu's tale is Yo Reilang, the fair boy who becomes the "wife" to Xu Jifan. In order to show his loyalty and chastity towards Xu, Reilang castrates himself to become more authentically female, so that he won't be tempted to copulate with females as his body matures. As the story unfolds, this paragon of devoted husband and wife will go through increasing trials and tribulations, an ordeal showing how firm their moral stances are. As Xu is executed, after a bunch of local hooligans set him up for a crime, Reilang (meaning "auspicious son") changes his name to Reinian (meaning "auspicious daughter", a name indicating his femininity) and brings Xu's stepson to live with Reinian's uncle. The rest of the story details how Reinian, in order to shield his son from the bad influence of "the way of male love" in the local area, moves three times in the hope of raising him to be a moral and "normal" man.

At the end of the story, Li Yu again reveals his own critical voice about this story,

commenting that, were it not for Reilang/Reinian's tenacious enactments of feminine virtue as a wife and a mother, this strange tale of male love would be of no significance.¹⁰

Li Yu's commentary has led various scholars to express different opinions about his attitude towards homoeroticism. David Evseeff reads his tone as ironic and subversive, insisting that Li Yu is taunting Confucian morality rather than homoeroticism.¹¹ Huang Lizhen holds an opposite view, regarding Li Yu's voice as one that denigrates homoeroticism.¹² Regardless of what Li Yu's attitude is, I find the tension between Confucian familialism and male love here productive. Does the nature of male love in this tale of Confucian feminine virtues subvert the orthodoxy of these moral codes? Or, in moralizing about the deviance of male homoeroticism, does this tale actually restore the insurmountable horizon of Confucianism? This unresolved tension or contradiction, in my view, becomes the inspiring source for Katherine Huiling Chou's adaptation. In her theatrical adaptation, this contradiction becomes the basis for her to instill multivocality, a feature that creates a queer diasporic rereading of Li Yu's tale.

Chou moves the historical background from the early Qing to the turn of the 20th century, a moment of historical rupture when a full-scale epistemic revolution happens in China, as it morphs from a dynastic empire into a modern nation state. As Chou's own study on the codes of attire during this time period indicates, we witness more fluidity in terms of gender codes and performances of identities at this moment of instability.¹³ By

¹⁰ Ibid..

¹¹ 中國文學研究第十九期, pp. 23-24.

¹² Lizhen Huang (黃麗貞), *Li Yu yan jiu* (李漁研究) (Taipei: Chun wen xue chu ban she, 1974), 342.

¹³ Huiling Zhou (周慧玲), *Biao yan Zhongguo: Nü ming xing, biao yan wen hua, shi jue zheng zhi, 1910-1945* (表演中國) (Taipei Shi: Mai tian chu ban, 2004), 253.

shifting the historical background, Chou makes two significant changes. First, she changes the uncle with whom Reinian lives into a female cousin who has cross-dressed as a man throughout her entire life. Second, she relocates the latter half of the story to another time-space—Taiwan in the 1950s and 1960s, a time period when Taiwan is under the reign of terror of the KMT government as part of the global Cold War condition. These significant changes in her theatrical adaptation allow for a modern reading of Li Yu's old tale—that is, the tension between Confucian familialism and deviant human desire now takes on the dimension of the modern nation state's reorganization of human sexuality. To ask how queerness in the modern Chinese cultural hegemony is possible, one needs to attend to the ongoing dynamics between Confucian familialism and the various regimes of the modern Chinese nation state.

I will now analyze her theatrical revision with respect to two considerations—that of body, and that of space. As a theatrical adaptation, Chou's version heavily relies on these two visual elements to engage in a queer diasporic critique of Li Yu's tale. First, the morally defined boundary between femininity and masculinity in Li's tale is replaced with a fluidity of gender codes and kinship relations that is made possible through choices of attire. Second, Chou uses minimalist elements—such as draperies and symbolic images—to constantly reconfigure the stage into various spaces. The fluidity of changing space on the stage works in accordance with the signifiers that are placed in flux from the disruption of dress code, producing the effect of a constant negotiation of meanings underneath the surface of reality. For example, after Reilang listens to his

father's instructions on the imperative of personal safety, he embarks on an initial journey out into the world under the protection of his cross-dressing cousin, Xiao Jiang. In this significant border-crossing moment, the drapery--an expandable lining made out of classical Chinese landscape paintings hung above the stage--starts to change its contours, indicating the change from the interior home space of Reilang's family to an exterior public space, here that of a temple festival where he is about to encounter Xu Jifang. The smoothness of changing space, created by the reconfiguration of the drapery, further accentuates the instability of gender performance, as Reilang and Xiao Jiang immediately cross the boundary between the domestic private sphere into public space, where gender is codified in accordance with visible sartorial indicators. In addition to the intended visual confusion of gender that is created by Xiaojiang's cross-dressing, what Chou further intends to achieve in this moment of border-crossing, in my view, is a deliberate play on the ethical categories within the kinship system of Confucian familialism. As Reilang and Xiaojiang enter the public-ness of the temple festival, they purposely joke about the combination of their appearances as "bunanbunu" (not male and not female; androgynous), a light-hearted play suggesting the indeterminacy of their gender appearances well as the possible ethical relationships between the two. Are they brothers? Are they friends? To an outsider's eyes, their actual gender-coded kinship relationship will never be revealed.

It is with this gendered difference that Chou reengages Li Yu's tale of male love. Through the figure of Xiaojiang, the cross-dressing Chinese woman who steps out of the

confinement of Confucianism into the public space of the modern business world,¹⁴ Chou stages her queer reading of Li Yu's tale. This figure of the cross-dressing "New Woman," who appears at the historical horizon of the turn of the 20th century, poses a challenge to the gender system of traditional Confucianism. The traditional Chinese gender system that Confucianism informs, as historians maintain, "must be considered within the hierarchical structure of the kinship system, where a socially recognizable 'man' and 'woman' is made. Consequently, gender distinctions in Chinese society should not be assumed to rely on a set of innate qualities assigned to the social categories of 'man' and 'woman,' or the biological categories of 'male' or 'female.'"¹⁵ The gender system that is maintained by Confucianism does not concern the constructed states of masculinity or femininity. Rather, it is first and foremost a kinship system that assigns gendered ethical positions along the continuum from individual to the state, upon which the family unit is the basis of building a harmonious society.

The appearance of the "New Woman" in modern Chinese history presents, then, a significant change to the Confucianism-informed system of gender and sexuality. It signposts the gradual transition from a kinship-based gender system to the personhood-based modern system of gender and sexuality. Nevertheless, this transition is never a complete one, as Susan Mann's study has shown that the formation of a modern Chinese gender/sexuality regime is largely under the control of the government. In the

¹⁴ Throughout the play, Xiaojiao is a cross-dressing woman who travels to do business in many different places around the world.

¹⁵Li-Hsiang Lisa Rosenlee, *Confucianism and women: a philosophical interpretation* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2006), 5–6.

government's management of gender and sexuality, the family unit is still at the core of its managing enterprises. To control the family, sometimes the state needs to deploy Confucian ideology, either as a positive or negative force, to implement its gender policy.¹⁶

To understand how queer identities and representations emerge in 20th century China, one needs to consider it against the changing regimes of modern gender and sexuality at the specific historical conditions of possibility. Chou's queer reinterpretation of Li Yu's tale is exposing how Confucian familialism might be co-opted by the discourse of national belonging that is generated by the modern nation state. In queering the gendered kinship system of Confucianism, Chou instead seeks to disrupt the discourse of national belonging, yielding to a performance of queer diaspora.

To read how she intends such a queer rereading, let us shift our discussion to the castration of Reilang. In Li Yu's tale, Reilang's act of castration, instead of being a traumatic act, is exactly what allows him to become the paragon of Confucian feminine virtues. In Chou's adaptation, this act of castration becomes the traumatic impetus for Reilang to flee from his birthplace; this act of castration symbolizes his feminization as well as a state of rootlessness. Chou adds a third character to the story—Chen Dalong, the ex-partner of Xu Jifang. In Chou's adaptation, he, out of intense jealousy and resentment, becomes the person who sets up a scheme to sabotage Xu and Reilang's romance. In the trial scene where Reilang and Xu are brought before a modern day judge, we see the

¹⁶Susan Mann, *Gender and sexuality in modern Chinese history* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 47–49.

portrait of the national father—Dr. Sun Yat-sen—hung high above the stage, a stage prop indicating the modern nation state’s intervention into personal sexual practices. Nevertheless, in staging this trial scene with a comic tone, Chou subverts the seriousness of the nation state’s control of personal sexuality. The crime of Reilang is his self-castration. The state’s over-investment in the intactness of Reilang’s manhood further shows us how Confucian familialism is appropriated by the modern nation state to strengthen its management of sexuality. In pronouncing Reilang’s crime, the judge, in a comically squeaking voice, condemns him for violating the ethical codes of filial piety: “there are three major abominations of the codes of filial pieties. Producing no offspring is the major one.” The criminalization of Reilang’s castration becomes the reason for his diasporic dispersion to Taiwan after the Chinese civil war. In order for Reilang to be spared the pain of physical punishment, Xu stands in for Reilang to take the imposed penalty of a spanking, which unfortunately leads to his sudden death. This highly melodramatic moment produces enormous emotional appeal for the audience, given that it is a sensationalized moment of melancholic loss that theatricalizes the contradiction between the nation state’s demands and individual sexual practices. Reilang’s self-castration becomes a political castration, by which the patrilineal demand of the nation state completes its subjugation of a perverse sexual subject. From this moment on, Reilang internalizes homophobia and changes his name to Reinian in order to live as authentically as a woman as possible. This scene of subjection renders Reinian’s “home” as no longer a livable place, and propels him to strike out in quest of another home—a

journey that brings him to Taiwan in the 1950s and 1960s.

How do we make sense of Chou's use of the symbol of Dr. Sun Yat-sen here? If the establishment of the Republic of China heavily relies on constructing the roots of traditional Chinese culture, then how do we understand Reinian's "rootlessness" in relation to the cultural root of the nation state? If the KMT regime's "relocation" to Taiwan defines its "loss" of China, then how do we read this loss in Reinian's diasporic journey to Taiwan?

Theories of queer diaspora attempt to deconstruct the heteronormativity of various diasporic discourses. They either critique the heteronormative impulse in mainstream diasporic discourses or call our attention to caution quick celebration of transnational migrations that enable queer survivals. That is, discourse of queer diaspora seeks possibilities of new queer intimacies created by migratory trajectories while paying attention to the power mechanism behind these migratory routes.¹⁷ In the case of Chou's adaptation, she capitalizes on the power mechanism behind Republic of China's relocation to Taiwan—that is, the reign of terror of the global Cold War condition. Connecting Reinian's internalized homophobia with global Cold War's panic about homosexuality and communism, Chou subverts the seriousness of this political climate by creating a queer diasporic family through the interstices within this new regime of sexuality.

As Reinian and Xiaojiang relocate to Taiwan, their cross-dressing practices

¹⁷ Cindy Patton and Benigno Sánchez-Eppler, *Queer diasporas* (Durham, [NC]: Duke University Press, 2000).

ironically make them appear to be a normative couple of husband and wife. What lies underneath the surface of reality—the queerness of their actual kinship relationship—will not be revealed until the very last moment. What’s even more interesting is how the older generation’s queerness gets inherited by the younger generation, as the homoerotic romance between Chengxian (literally meaning “inheriting legacy”) and Nianzhu (“missing the ancestors”) grows. The triangulated melodrama of love and jealousy among Xu, Reinian and Chen will eventually be undone as Chengxian (the son of Reinian and Xu) and Nianzhu (the son of Chen) become intimate with each other, forming a romantic tie blessed by Reinian and Xiao Jiang. The deconstructive significance of this cross-generational romantic comedy must be considered against the historical backdrop. Set in 1950s and 1960s Taiwan, the latter half of the play hits on the intersection between politics and sexuality. As homosexuals and communists are categorized together as the threat to national security during these Cold War years in Taiwan,¹⁸ the formation of an alternative queer family in the latter half of the play, in light of this historical context, is a daring challenge to the political regulations of that time period. For example, early in the play, when Reinian starts to fear the possible homoerotic relationship between Chengxian and Nianzhu, she repeatedly threatens them with “the crime of communist spies,” warning them that they might be brought before the secret agent of the government. The seriousness of the politicization of sexuality, nevertheless, is comically resolved in the last scene, when Reinian is selected by the school as a “model mother” for her persistence

¹⁸ Taiwan). Xing/bie yan jiu shi Guo li zhong yang da xue (Zhongli, *Gu er li lun you zheng zhi = b Queer politics and queer theory*. (Zhongli: Guo li zhong yang da xue xing/bie yan jiu shi, 1998), 263.

in carrying out motherly duties. The final scene is the formation of a queer diasporic family disguised under the pretense of a model Confucian family. In order to dress properly for the ceremony, Reinian takes out a tailored suit that she made with Xu before when they were still a loving couple. In donning herself with this suit, “she” reveals the fact that she was a he before. Furthermore, the cross-generational romance is revealed to the young ones, who take turns putting on the pair of tailored suits, symbolically completing their previous generation’s imcompleted romance. In addition, the always cross-dressed Xiaojiang purposefully dons herself with a lady’s dress. In this final moment of gender reversal, the definition of official motherhood is subverted. A ritual that defines official motherhood, in a satirical comedy of manners, is turned upside down and thus into a validation of the formation of a queer diasporic family.

Being Chinese Queer

The case study of Katherine Huiling Chou’s *He is my Wife, He is my Mother* allows us to see that the Chinese queer familial imagination does not simply concern the relevance of Confucian familialism in the modern world; it, more often than not, also entails an affective politics of national belonging—the political afterlives of “Chineseness” in its various 20th century transformations. This project is a historiography of Chinese queer familial imaginations in the 20th century. In discussing the selected case studies, I hope to explore the affective politics surrounding the discursive sites of home in these

queer familial imaginations, exploring the tension or dialectics between Chineseness and queerness.

Upholding the trope of home as a discursive site where Chineseness and queerness mutually constitute each other, this project aligns itself with the transnational turn in recent queer studies. The emergence of the field of transnational queer studies inevitably evokes the epistemological problematic of the divide between Western universalism and non-Western particularism—the idea that queer theory as a North American discipline provides universal models of queerness, whereas non-Western cultures only serve as raw materials to testify to the validity of the universalism of queerness. In the case of Chinese queer studies, the discourse of Chinese exceptionalism emerges to write a unique Chinese history of sexuality that is beyond the purview of Eurocentric theory. Giovanni Vitiello, Chou Hua-san, and Bret Hinschall all argue for a distinctively different pre-modern Chinese attitude towards sexuality from the West, of which a Chinese tolerance of homosexuality is an exemplary instance.¹⁹ As Petrus Liu alerts us, though, this cultural exceptionalism eventually leads to a conflict between a queer critique of heteronormativity and a postcolonial critique of allochronism.²⁰ If postcolonial critique aims to dismantle the teleological subjugation imposed by the colonial production of the other, then constructing an exceptional Chinese history of sexuality only creates a counter-discursive space to the Western episteme, at the expense of recognizing the local

¹⁹ See Huashan Zhou, *Tong zhi lun* (Xianggang: Xianggang tong zhi yan jiu she, 1995). Bret Hinsch, *Passions of the cut sleeve: the male homosexual tradition in China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990). Giovanni Vitiello, *The libertine's friend: homosexuality and masculinity in late imperial China* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2011).

²⁰Petrus Liu, "Why Does Queer Theory Need China?," *positions: east asia cultures critique* 18, Vol 2 (2010): 298.

regime of sexual normativity.

Tom Boellstorff defines this dilemma as the “reconfigurations of the grid of similitude and difference” in the ongoing “glocal” dialectical processes during globalization.²¹ If the globalization of Euro-American production of queerness affects a homogenization of queer culture, then emergences of “queer” cultures in various non-Western locales are neither merely products of the global flow nor totally different from their Euro-American counterparts. On the contrary, they consist of global as well as local cultural patterns, propelling an incessant mutual constitution of the global and the local.

In this regard, Chineseness and queerness are not two mutually exclusive discursive sites; they are brought together to redefine each other through transnational encounters. This ongoing mutual redefinition not only celebrates the multiplicities of queer subjects, but also further complicates the politics of sameness and differences in the glocal production of Chinese queer subjects. Petrus Liu acutely identifies here the transnational impulse in contemporary Chinese *tongzhi* literature:

The fact that modern Chinese queer literature emerged through, and as an interrogation of, the meanings of Chineseness suggests that no account of sexuality is complete without a consideration of geopolitics—how nations are formed and their borders policed, how these institutions sustain and constrain the possibilities of lives....queer identities are as much about private sexuality as they are about the political tensions, cultural exchanges and economic inequalities

²¹Tom Boellstorff, *The gay archipelago: sexuality and nation in Indonesia* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 29.

between China, Taiwan, and America...the beginning of “trans-national queer politics”: a mode of mobilizing one’s distance from heteronormativity as a critique of the nation state....the “queer” and the “Chinese” bear on each other at all times, incessantly changing the ways each term is debated in public culture, represented in literature, and imagined in thoughts private or public.²²

As Liu perceptively observes, tracing the emergences of Chinese queer subjects does not just involve a linguistic or psychoanalytic mapping of a gendered/sexualized mechanism of subjectivization; it requires an investigation of the geopolitical dimension in such subject productions. Liu’s call for the centrality of geopolitics brings to our attention the spatial as well as temporal dimensions of transnational queer politics, for geopolitics refers to not only the geographical borders, relations, and alliances among various politico-economic entities, but also to the changing landscape of shifting alliances and disaffiliations in history.

Therefore, an understanding of Chinese queerness, examined in the light of a geopolitical critique, foregrounds the question of sexual modernity in a postcolonial context. If queer politics, following Foucault’s view, is only possible after the epistemic shift whereby the heterosexual/homosexual divide takes place, then the emergences of “Chinese” queer subjects index moments of geopolitical reconfigurations of the epistemological, politico-economic, and cultural borders of “China” that create conditions of possibility for queer visibility.

This project thus does not adopt a chronological structure of historical writing. It pinpoints four historical moments at four geopolitical sites where the ever-shifting

²²Liu, “Why Does Queer Theory Need China?,” 292.

imaginary of “China” opens up questions concerning modernity, nationhood, and the changing technologies of gender and sexuality. They are the following: 1) Republican China 1910-1930; 2) Post-Martial Law Taiwan since the 1980s; 3) Post-Socialist China since the 1990s; 4) Contemporary China and Taiwan. It is these four geo-historical sites where we see queer expressions become visible in 20th century China. It is when the political, cultural, and epistemological borders of “China” are under contestations and negotiations that we see queerness emerge, either as a way of intervening in this contestation or as a line of flight away from any form of hegemonic “Chineseness.”

Home, oh My Sentimental Loss

Much of the wrestling between Chineseness and queerness happens in the battleground of home. As the case study of *He is My Wife, He is my Mother* indicates, Chinese queerness in the 20th century must be analyzed through the interstices between the old gendered kinship system of Confucianism and the modern regimes of gender/sexuality. Therefore, I focus my discussions of queerness in the selected texts around the site of home, an idea that often conveys the possibility of ultimate belonging. In the context of 20th century China, the trope of home, as its implications for affirming cultural roots suggest, often bears the ontological weight of a modern Chinese national subject’s identity formation.

Many scholars have identified the sentimental mode as a primary affective means of

articulating or depicting home. Rey Chow, in tracing the origin of this mode to the European tradition of sentimentalism, defines this affective means of articulation as primarily an existential sensibility of loss in modernity—a melancholic awareness of the infinite deferral of the ideal as well as the passing of time that is often associated with tropes of home, a symbol of shelter safeguarding us from modernity's brutalizing threats.

As she explicates:

Still, why does so much of the drama of the sentimental have to do with domesticity, the household, and the home?....As the material structure basic to human existence, the house is lived, we may say, as a boundary differentiating an inside holding the comfortable apart from the uncomfortable, and hence as a home—a refuge from a tyrannical world. Because it functions as a refuge, this inside also tends to take on the import of a timeless, undifferentiated, and infinitely adaptable (interpersonal) time/space whereby conflicts ought to be resolved and opposite ought to be reconciled. The modes of human relationships affectively rooted in this imagined inside—an inside whose depths of feeling tend to become intensified with the perceived aggressive challenges posed by modernity—are what I would argue as sentimental.²³

While Chow assigns this sentimental mode here to a group of contemporary Chinese cinematic expressions, her same explication can actually be applied to her earlier study on representations of femininity in modern Chinese literature, in which she also identifies the prevalence of the sentimental mode. In light of the above analysis, what is previously left unexplained—why is the sentimental mode prevalent in modern Chinese

²³Rey Chow, *Sentimental fabulations, contemporary Chinese films: attachment in the age of global visibility* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), 18–19.

literature?—is later explained in her study of contemporary Chinese cinema. The sentimental mode, identified by Chow and others²⁴ as being so prevailing in modern Chinese literature and culture, affectively defines a modern Chinese national/cultural subject's tenuous relationship with modernity. This subject, to be more exact with its gender specificity, is often a male subject who controls the discursive formations of Chinese modernity. Hence, sentimentality is often associated with the constructions of femininity and a series of metaphors that are attached to these constructions, such as motherland, home space, self-sacrifice, and cultural origin. As Rey Chow maintains:

If feminine self-sacrifice was the major support of traditional Chinese culture, it is not surprising that, during a time period of massive social transformations, the collapse of tradition would find its most moving representations in the figures of those who are traditionally the most oppressed, figures that become “stand-ins” for China's traumatized self-consciousness in every sense of the phrase. In this way, “woman” does not simply amount to a new type of literary content but, more so, to a new agency, a dialectic of resistance-in-giveness that is constitutive of modernity in a non-Western, but Westernized, context.²⁵

The gender politics identified by Chow in this sentimental mode are not unique to the Chinese context. As scholars who revisit the tradition of the sentimental novel, theatrical or cinematic melodrama, or the larger genealogy of sentimentalism have

²⁴ See Leo Ou-fan Lee, *The romantic generation of modern Chinese writers*. (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1973).; Haiyan Lee, *Revolution of the Heart: A Genealogy of Love in China, 1900-1950*, (Stanford University Press, 2010).; Jin Feng, *The new woman in early twentieth-century Chinese fiction* (West Lafayette, Ind.: Purdue University Press, 2004).

²⁵ Rey Chow, *Woman and Chinese modernity: the politics of reading between West and East* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1991), 170.

demonstrated, the emotional excess that has defined the sentimental or melodramatic modes has gone through a cycle of re-evaluations. This historical trajectory has gradually relegated the sentimental to the negative side of modernity, associating it with the feminine gender that becomes the other to the masculine modern subject of rationality. The rise of the cult of sentiments, on the one hand, carves out a space for the modern “man and woman of feelings” to experiment with their expressions of true desiring selves; on the other, as it develops historically, the free reign of sentiments gradually becomes rigidified and codified with normative gender and sexual signifiers. These scholars usually observe how the cult of sensibility or sentiment rises against the backdrop of the waning of monarchical absolutism. As a cult that embraces true feelings as the tenets of beings, the sentimentalists pursue human equality with the belief that all humans are emotive agents who can traverse existential barriers by connecting with each other through mutual affective correspondences.

For example, William Reddy delineates the spread of literary salons around the French revolutionary era and discusses how these salons become major venues for sentimentalism, which spawns revolutionary thoughts and social transformations.²⁶ Margaret Cohen revisits a French literary tradition—the sentimental novel—and reveals its historical importance in offering “a tragic resolution to the problem of freedom in the wake of the French Revolution.”²⁷ She further traces the historical replacement of this

²⁶William M Reddy, *The navigation of feeling : a framework for the history of emotions* (Cambridge, U.K.; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

²⁷Margaret Cohen, *The sentimental education of the novel* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1999), 23.

literary paradigm with realism, observing a masculinization in this change. That is, sentimentalism, as it evolves throughout the 18th century, is gradually associated with femininity and regarded as a form of excessive pathos that is unfit for political engagement.²⁸ Across the English Channel, while the thought of sentimentalism is imported as a progenitor of modern democracy and republicanism that is in line with manliness, sociability, and civic virtue, we also witness a gradual gender codification of this form of affective subjectivity. As Mike Goode writes, “a vast body of recent work on eighteenth-century masculinity has yielded an account of masculinity as heterogeneous entity....By the end of the eighteenth century, the always unstable, normative social ideal of the polite gentleman was being contested.”²⁹

What implications does this historical account of the codifications of sentimentalism have for queer theorists? The process by which normative gender codes stabilized, of which Goode speaks above, could be regarded as the early stage of the historical formation of a modern normative sex/gender/sexuality system. If we situate Foucault’s history of sexuality in the history of feelings and moral subjects, we might observe a heteronormative process in the historical genealogy of sentimentalism. If the rise of sentimentalism presents a seemingly infinite plenitude for multiple desiring subjects to emerge, then the historical enforcement of the heteronormative institution of modern bourgeois life circumscribes the normative realm out of this Utopia of human desires and pleasures. In the name of “true love,” this sanctioned institution of ultimate human

²⁸Ibid., 77–118.

²⁹Mike Goode, *Sentimental masculinity and the rise of history, 1790-1890* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 13.

intimacy and belonging becomes the only legitimate form for one to realize his or her pursuit of affective freedom.

Informed by queer theory, Christopher Nagle revisits the historical vicissitudes of the figure of the “man of feelings” since the early 18th century, disclosing how early forms of intimacy and liaisons, such as the idea of “romantic friendship,” in part, can elucidate how the modern sexual regime delimits the scope of human intimacy. In another way, these early forms of intimacy make us realize that the traditions of sensibility and romanticism harbor abundant radical imaginations for queer theorists to consider the issues of “permeable boundaries, affective excess, and the relationship between the aesthetic and the ethico-political.”³⁰

In *Between Men*, Eve Sedgwick studies the gradual gendering and sexualization of social intimacies in British literature of the early modern era, observing how the prevalent homosocial desire is gradually policed by a rising pathological discourse of homosexual panic.³¹ In *Epistemology of the Closet*, she further develops her historical mapping of sexuality and pronounces that the modern homosexual/heterosexual divide of the male gender is the central epistemic question in the formation of modern knowledge and the social order. Modernity supposes the inner truth of an individual’s being. For Foucault, this inner truth, over the course of the 18th and 19th centuries, has become a sexual truth. In other words, one’s authenticity is first and foremost one’s hidden sexual secret; for one

³⁰Christopher Carl Nagle, *Sexuality and the culture of sensibility in the British romantic era* (New York; Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 9.

³¹Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Between men: English literature and male homosocial desire* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985).

to come to self-realization, one needs to come to terms with one's sexual unconsciousness. The sexualization of subjectivity that Sedgwick observes is what Foucault describes as the emergence of the modern sexual regime—the discourses of psychology, psychoanalysis, and biology that constitute dominant sexology. Foucault's genealogical critique attempts to unveil the historical contingency of these truth-claiming discourses and thus to reveal how this heteronormative power mechanism is at the service of modern biopolitics. Sedgwick furthers Foucault's discussion by pointing out how this regime hinges upon the hetero/homo divide, a binarism that depends on an unresolved contradiction between a universalizing and a minoritizing view; this discursive incoherence of modern sexual knowledge, once unveiled, can expose the epistemic contradiction of the entire modern regime of knowledge.³² If Sedgwick, from *Between Men* to *The Epistemology of the Closet*, delineates how the mode of affective subjectivity gets sexualized and codified by the heteronormative regime, she nonetheless then exposes how this process leaves unresolved discursive contradictions. Queer theorists who turn to the tradition of sentimentalism thus attempt to investigate “not only the historical and cultural residues of heterosexual becoming, but also the *other* ways in which normativity has rendered our feelings, our selves.”³³

This short literature review above allows us to see how the recent affective turn in queer theory, along the revisionist lines of historical sentimentalism, has started to unpack the consequences of the heteronormative codification of feelings. My own study

³²Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the closet* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990).

³³ Paul Kelleher, "Men of feeling: sentimentalism, sexuality, and the conduct of life in eighteenth-century British literature," 2003, 26.

broadens the critical valence of queerness, expanding its horizon from sexual intimacies to affective ethical relationships with respect to formations of family and friendship. In other words, a study of queerness along a fuller spectrum of relationality, and through a consideration of the context of sentimentalism, can provide us with a different lens to reopen, in Rey Chow's words, "the enduringly fraught ethics of human sociality as mediated by art and fiction."³⁴ This ongoing ethical tension of human sociality is the quintessential feature of the "moral occult", which Peter Brooks defines as the characteristic of "the melodramatic mode of imagination."³⁵

Peter Brooks situates the emergence of this mode in the political vacuum after the French Revolution, when "the traditional imperatives of truth and ethics have been violently thrown into question, yet where the promulgation of truth and ethics, their instauration as a way of life, is of immediate, daily, political concern."³⁶ What Brooks means by the "moral occult" is an aesthetic attempt to engage ethico-political value (re)formation by way of emotional appeals in the midst of this historical rupture. In the absence of a divine moral and social order, a theatrical form of sensation developed, one that carries the burden of expressing what Brooks names as the "moral occult": "the domain of operative spiritual values which is both indicated within and masked by the surface of reality."³⁷ Brooks's central thesis, then, is that the quest for a hidden moral legibility is crucial to all melodramas.

³⁴Chow, *Sentimental fabulations, contemporary Chinese films*, 17.

³⁵Peter Brooks, *The melodramatic imagination: Balzac, Henry James, melodrama, and the mode of excess* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1976), 15.

³⁶Ibid., 15.

³⁷Ibid., 5.

Similarly, Lothar Fietz traces such a historical formation of early British melodrama from German sentimental plays. Studying the changing representations of gender, class, and sociality in Lillo's *London Merchant*, Kotzebue's, and Sheridan's plays, Fietz observes how the domestic space becomes an important milieu for the modern bourgeois hero to define his place in the existential universe. Sentimentality in the domestic setting allows the modern bourgeois hero to claim his tragic grandeur and emulate his putative superhuman, premodern predecessors in Greek tragedies and Shakespearean plays. This sentimentality, as opposed to the cosmological and metaphysical tragic feelings in classical tragedies, often leads to a moral sentimentalism that "reflects the bourgeoisie's confidence in the power of its virtue and their ability to eliminate the tensions and conflicts that had been calculated into tragedy."³⁸ Fietz further points out that this sentimentality in early melodrama differs from classical tragic pathos in its tendency to resolve conflicts for "the reinstatement of the individual within the harmony of the bourgeois order."³⁹ In other words, if classical tragedy pits noble figures against unfathomable cosmic forces to showcase the limits of human sovereignty in front of the transcendental, then later sentimental plays and melodramas stage the existential crisis of their bourgeois hero in the immanent spheres of the domestic and the social. Furthermore, unlike classical tragedy that ends with a subliminal moment of tragic revelation, melodramas have a strong penchant for tragic resolution.

Pathos in melodrama, indexing moments of excessive emotional-cum-moral

³⁸ Michael Hays and Anastasia Nikolopoulou, *Melodrama: the cultural emergence of a genre* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1996), 85.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 37.

confusion, is always intrinsic to the reconstitution of *ethos* after this temporary confusion. Pathos and ethos in melodrama, in other words, co-constitute each other. The pathos stemming from the tensions in domestic setting is usually coterminous with a larger moral problem in society. Hence the emotional trials and tribulations in domestic dramas always lead to a reformation of ethos. In light of this dialectics between ethos and pathos, melodrama entails another important dimension in the makeup of modern society—the public and private divide. The paradoxical nature of the institution of melodrama itself allows for the intrusion of the public into stories about private lives.. While the melodramatic mode usually speaks to the unspeakable desires and secrecy of human lives, the social sphere of theatre/cinema provides a space for the viewing public to ponder over and discuss the unresolved tensions and entangled relations between the private and the public.⁴⁰ Melodrama washes its familial dirty laundry in public; it hyperbolizes issues of domestic intimacy for a sentimental education of the modern citizens. What lies at the heart of this sentimental education is the bourgeois codification of gender roles—proper femininity and masculinity—in the domestic and social spheres.

The above overview of the rise of the sentimental and melodramatic modes entails significant implications for queer cultural expressions. If the pathos of emotional excess constitutes sites of social contradiction in these popular modes of cultural expression, then it would be worthwhile to study the affective politics of queerness in relation to depictions of home in these sentimental/melodramatic modes. Queer theorists' studies of

⁴⁰ See Miriam Hansen's conception of the cinema as an alternative public space in her *Babel and Babylon: spectatorship in American silent film*. (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1991).

these modes, across historical periods and media, have attempted to figure out how this “intimate public” can function as an affective pedagogy of the subjects of a hegemonic liberal democracy,⁴¹ while offering possibilities for alternative imaginations of “new forms of intimate association, vocabularies of affect, styles of embodiment, erotic practices and relations of care and pedagogy.”⁴²

Queer Family Romance

Building on previous Western and Chinese scholarship on the sentimental and melodramatic modes, this project studies the affective politics of home in the changing contours of Chinese queer familial imaginations throughout the 20th century. As Rey Chow’s studies have shown, the rise of the sentimental or melodramatic mode in modern Chinese culture is a cultural response to modernity’s encroachment; it is primarily an affective attempt of reparation to resolve the melancholic sense of loss brought on by the ruptures of the modern time. This melancholic sense of loss, in China’s semi-colonial context, is often equated with the spectre or hauntology of “China”⁴³ as a cultural or

⁴¹ Cael Keegan, "Queer Melodramatics The Feeling Body and the American Democratic Imagination," 2010. <http://proquest.umi.com/pqdweb?did=1974753351&sid=5&Fmt=2&clientId=39334&RQT=309&VName=PQD>. For the concept of the “intimate public,” see Lauren Gail Berlant, *The female complaint: the unfinished business of sentimentality in American culture* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008).

⁴² Michael Warner, *Publics and counterpublics* (New York; Cambridge, Mass.: Zone Books; Distributed by MIT Press, 2002), 57.

⁴³ Here, I am describing “China” not as an essentialized entity but a changing construct. In the context of solidifying a modern Chinese subject, the constructed-ness of China has become a hauntological or spectral site, in the sense of Derrida, whereby the changing imaginaries of China take place throughout the 20th century. See Jinshu Huang (黃錦樹), *Wen yu hun yu ti: lun xian dai Zhongguo xing* (文與魂與體：論現代中國性) (Taipei Shi: Mai tian chu ban, 2006).

political imaginary.

To read queer visibility in these changing sentimental and melodramatic modes of familial imaginations, my project regards queerness as sites of affective excess that resists the tendency towards ideological closures in the sentimental and melodramatic modes. Queerness, emerging from these sentimental or melancholic renditions of Chineseness, perpetuates a definitional tension that keeps the contours of Chineseness open. To do so, I identify four geopolitical sites where queerness emerges.

My first chapter starts with a consideration of the prequel to the rise of popular family dramas in the 1910s, by bringing us back to another primal scene of modern Chinese theatre—the Spring Willow Society’s productions in Tokyo. I study a key participant in this amateur student club, Ouyang Yuqian (1889-1962), tracing his career-long penchant for sentimentality as a cultural expression related to the Chu Yuan poetic tradition. Ouyang started his career by impersonating European melodramatic female characters with the Spring Willow Society. Such a beginning allowed him to experiment with realistic modes of female impersonation, which distinguishes his masquerading of the gendered other from that in traditional *dan* acting, a technique that mostly relies on codified executions of typological bodily expressions. Ouyang’s acts of female impersonation thus open up a cultural avenue where the formation of a modern subject based on authentic sentiments can be experimented upon in his performances, including his performances of “immoral” female characters in 1910s family drama. I argue that his emphatic approach to understanding the gendered other leads him to an

ontological queasiness through which the crossings of phantasmatic identifications happen; this ontological deconstruction enables him to create Nora images that are significantly different from the Noras created by other male members of the May Fourth elite in the 1920s and 1930s. I contend that, because of his experience with radical alterity in impersonations, the Nora images that he creates run against a rising liberalist heteronormativity. Additionally, through this study, I argue that the making of normative sexual modernity in the Republican era is in tandem with the ongoing discursive formations of “Chineseness.” I situate my definition of queer affect in the continuous tension between normative gendered and sexualized national subjectivity and the desires to re-orient or recodify this normative impulse. Hence, I consider the critical validity of the Sinophone, and its possible dialectical relations to Chineseness in general, as a way to open up a critical space for the queer and the Chinese to mutually constitute and reconstitute each other in an endless dialectical process through various historical conditions of possibility.

My second and third chapters look at how reified *tongzhi* (a transcultural queer subject position in the Sinophone communities) subjects and self-consciously queer cultural expressions respectively emerged in Taiwan and Mainland China since the 1980s. The Cold War creates a standoff between the two sides, leading the two ruling regimes—the KMT in Taiwan and the Chinese Communist Party in the Mainland—to adopt different modes of governmentality and biopolitics over its national body. The KMT ruling of Taiwan adopts an ideology of capitalist developmentalism, aiming for the

maximization of productivity and liberalization of the state. Its governmentality, according to Aihwa Ong's study, adopts zoning technologies that create the political consequences of "graduated sovereignty" and "graduated citizenship" within the island itself, a result reflecting the increasing social antagonism within Taiwan that will eventually erupt as the historical rise of a national identity crisis from the 1970s onwards. The KMT's governmentality heavily relies on the pastoral power of Confucian moral sentimentalism, an affective pedagogy that aims to erase the consequences of "graduated sovereignty" with the Confucian ideology of familial-social harmony. I situate the rise of *tongzhi* expressions in such a historical condition, when an affective politics of *ressentiment* and melancholia erupts to rewrite the official familial-social scripts. Discursively formed as an ongoing, overheated debate over national identity, this historical moment of epistemic change also opens up a space for the KMT's script of normative sexual modernity to be reconsidered. Against this socio-political backdrop, I analyze in my second chapter the changing social receptions of a text, *Crystal Boys* by Bai Xianyong (1937~), seeking to understand what sexual and national politics are entailed in the social process of *Crystal Boys*'s selection and reinterpretation as the Ur-text for the emergence of the *tongzhi* imagined community. I observe the importance of an alternative locally informed cultural source—*The Story of Mulian Rescuing His Mother*—in Bai's intervention in the sanctioned Confucian script. His maternal turn is echoed in the aesthetics of the queer theatre—Tian Chi-yuan's Critical Point Theatre—from the late 1980s onwards. By looking at this Ur-text alongside queer theatre

in Taiwan in the same historical condition, I hope to elucidate how the specificities of medium provide them with different aesthetic strategies. Nevertheless, I argue that the historical rise of *tongzhi* aesthetics in Taiwan, regardless of differences in medium, collectively addresses the emerging pressing issues of the ethics of alterity in an increasingly globalized world.

What implications does this transcultural formation of a local queer community entail for the larger critical valences of the queer and the Sinophone? If we want to go beyond an identity politics of *ressentiment*, how can the Sinophone and the queer coalesce to generate new ways of discussing identity formation? These questions lead me to the next chapter, where I discuss the formation of queer aesthetics in post-Socialist China. As with the previous chapter, I start with an overview of how the Chinese Communist regime launches its totalitarian governmentality with the party-state model. I do so in order to situate this queer emergence in the “cultural fever” to rewrite the socialist lexicons of belonging and national cultural memory from the 1980s. As the cultural movements, across media, of *xungen* (“root searching”) and *shanghen* (“overcoming trauma”) suggest, post-Socialist China witnesses a collective attempt to rebuild socio-national imaginaries upon the perceived loss and ruin of the extreme leftist era of the Cultural Revolution. Such a recuperative attempt heavily relies on a cultural reinvention of tradition. That is, for one to become a modern “Chinese” person again, so as to enter a new global condition of transnational capitalism, the traumatic memory of extreme leftist destruction must be overcome with the rediscovery of cultural roots, a

phenomenon epitomized by Xie Jin's new melodramas that signal the return of Confucian familialism. I situate the emergence of the first post-Socialist Chinese queer text, *East Palace, West Palace*, as well as Lin Yingyu's theatrical adaptation of Jean Genet's *The Maids* in this historical condition. I intend to elucidate how the queerness in these texts challenges the emerging coterminous normative formations between "Chineseness" and gendered/sexualized national subjects.

My last chapter addresses a pressing issue of the contemporary moment: how can queerness retain its criticality in a world where sexual diversity is usually a consequence of its own commodification? Juxtaposing contemporary self-identified queer independent filmmakers/activists, Mickey Chen from Taiwan and Cui Zi'en from China, I look at the intermedial cross-fertilizations between their filmmaking and personal memoirs, analyzing how queer desires in this set of works are affects produced as a result of the deterritorialization and reterritorialization of the nuclear family in an age of global neoliberalism. These affects, as power to act, can transform value. I look at the respective melodramatic and transcendental moments in Chen's and Cui's works as affects that transform the conventional values associated with the liberalist nuclear family, thus indexing new possibilities of familial belonging.

CHAPTER 1

FROM CAMILLE TO PAN JINLIAN: POLITICS OF PUBLIC SENTIMENTS IN OUYANG YUQIAN'S FEMALE IMPERSONATION

Entering Camille

In 1907, an amateur overseas Chinese student group of art lovers, named *The Spring Willow Society*, staged the last two scenes of *La Dame aux Camelias* at the *Hongoza* theatre in Tokyo. This production, with a major purpose of fundraising to alleviate the flood damage in southern China, is now canonized by theatre historians as one of the starting moments of modern Chinese theatre. The lead student, Li Sutong, following the Chinese *dan* and the Japanese *onnagata* traditions,⁴⁴ impersonates the leading female protagonist—Camille. His efforts to impersonate this quintessential figure of European melodramatic femininity have now been immortalized by photos and Ouyang Yuqian's memoir. Leafing through any books of modern Chinese theatre history, one will always encounter this photo of his, revealing how realistically Li Sutong attempts to portray this role. What kind of historical and cultural significance can we tease out from this particular moment? How do we make sense of the fact that modernity on the Chinese stage arrives with the *impersonation* of European melodramatic femininity? If this production is to evoke the viewing public's sympathy for fundraising, how does Camille,

⁴⁴ Many of those earlier Chinese theatre practitioners were influenced by the Japanese *Shinpa*. For example, Lu Jing-rou was taught by Fujisawa Azajiro. See Siyuan Liu, "The Impact of Shinpa on Early Chinese Huaju," *Asian Theatre Journal* 23.2 (2006): 342–355.

as a sentimentalized female figure, foster such a public sentiment that yields to a collective sympathy?

The set of questions I raise here touch upon the central theoretical issues I will address in my revisiting of the making of “New Woman” on the Chinese stage. That is, if we acknowledge that the engendering of “New Woman” is indispensable to the introduction of new sexual and social orders in modernity,⁴⁵ how can the act of impersonation complicate our understanding of this historical process, especially where the politics of public sentiments surrounding this act of dragging is concerned? Feminist scholars have revealed to us that the dramatic or literary constructions of “New Woman” in Europe are mostly acts of impersonation by male artists or intellectuals.⁴⁶ Similarly, in the Chinese context, Rey Chow, among many others, has convincingly demonstrated that the making of “New Woman” in China is a process informed by local patriarchs’ attempts to recuperate a Chinese self in the power dynamics between East and West.⁴⁷ While agreeing with these critics’ deconstructive interventions, I wonder if the picture will be complicated if we look at impersonation not only as masquerading the other⁴⁸, but

⁴⁵ Many studies have been done on the historical making of “New Woman” in different cultural contexts. In the context of Republican China, Hu Ying looks at practices of literary translation as transcultural practices that foster “New Woman.” Jin Feng examines the different politics of gender representation of new femininity between male and female writers during the modern period. See Ying Hu, *Tales of translation: composing the new woman in China, 1899-1918* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2000); Feng, *The new woman in early twentieth-century Chinese fiction*.

⁴⁶ See J. Ellen Gainor, *Shaw’s daughters: dramatic and narrative constructions of gender* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1991); Nancy Armstrong, *Desire and domestic fiction: a political history of the novel* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987).

⁴⁷ See Chow, *Woman and Chinese modernity*.

⁴⁸ Laurence Senelick has a detailed literature review on feminists’ critique of male impersonation of the gendered other. Basically, the concept of masquerade is used to indicate how male impersonation, throughout different cultural and historical sites, more or less entail patriarchal attempts to codify femininity. See Laurence Senelick, *The changing room: sex, drag, and theatre* (London; New York: Routledge, 2000), 3–8.

also as a practice of affective exchange where the dynamics of self and other might be disrupted, yielding to a moment of what Nicholas Ridout calls “ontological queasiness.”⁴⁹ That is, if we further our discussion of the impersonation of modern femininity from the representational level to the affective level, can we possibly understand the making of modern sexuality in a different light?

This chapter offers such an attempt. Focusing on the theatre career of Ouyang Yuqian (1889-1962), I will critically examine affective moments surrounding his impersonation of the New Woman, either through acting or playwriting. This chapter tries to understand how an embodied impersonation of the feminine other might differ from that of literary imagination like most reformist intellectuals do; *his embodied practice of othering, instead of claiming the other for one's own purpose, I argue, leads to a desire for becoming the other, an affective economy that entails larger significance for the politics of public sentiments around the feminine images he creates.* I will first start with Ouyang's initiation into the theatre world through his fascination with Camille, examining how his association of sentimental femininity with theatricality might entail a larger meaning for the new social milieu of theatre spaces around the time of political turmoil from the late Qing to Republican China. With my analysis of his theatre career, I hope to elucidate how aesthetic practice, in the case of Ouyang, partly participates in the discursive formation of normative concepts of gender and sexual morality; partly it also

⁴⁹ Theatre scholar Nicholas Ridout proposes this concept by way of Levinas's concept of alterity. I will have further elaborations on this later. See Nick Ridout, *Stage fright, animals, and other theatrical problems* (Cambridge, UK; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

creates disruption, dissonance or excess that exceeds such a process. I will pay my attention to the affective aspects of Ouyang's theatrical endeavor.

Politics of Feminine Sentimentality

In his memoir, Ouyang details his predisposition towards impersonating sentimental femininity in his early childhood.⁵⁰ Ouyang's predisposition should not be regarded as an indication of psychic regression in Freudian terms; this form of sentimental femininity actually shares with the long legacy of melancholic poetic sentiments in Chinese literati's expressions since Qu Yuan's time. Qu Yuan, as an iconic figure of the self-feminized patriotic poet, represents this quintessential form of sentimental femininity. Legend has it that after Qu Yuan falls out of favor by the Emperor of Chu, he exiles himself to the frontier, wandering around on the bank of the Milo River. Donning himself with flowers and herbs, he often compares himself as a *xiangcao meiren* (a floral beauty) who loses the emperor's trust and love. His melancholic dwelling on the loss of the emperor's favor is well documented in an anthology of poems from the period of the Warring States (480-403 BC)—*Chu Ci*. Qu Yuan's self-feminization, if not to be examined in terms of sexuality, is a political-cum-poetic trope of frustrated masculinity. The Qu Yuan Lore has become a popular vehicle of self-expression for the depowered officials to express their angst and sadness when they fall out of the emperors' favor throughout different

⁵⁰ In his memoir, he talks about his fondness towards role-playing and poem reciting, in which he has a tendency to mimic femininity and experience sentimentality. See Yuqian Ouyang, *Zi wo yan xi yi lai* (Taipei Shi: Long wen chu ban she, 1990), 2-4.

dynasties. This form of self-aware appropriation of sentimental femininity is a performance by “the feminized, submissive position of the male officials.”⁵¹ What lies behind this deliberate performance is an attempt to articulate the possibility of political agency when the circumstances forbid it.

Ouyang associates sentimentality with the ongoing political turmoil in China when the old dynastic political order is challenged and a new political order is being rebuilt with uncertainty.⁵² In light of this historical context, we might look at his confession about the tendency towards sentimental femininity as a conscious or unconscious appropriation of the Qu Yuan sentiments. This appropriation can be further elucidated by his deployment of theatricality to act out this invisible sentiment. If this theatricalized feminine sentimentality is what draws Ouyang into theatre, we will not be surprised to see how he gets initiated into the theatrical scene after seeing Li Sutong’s performance of *Camille*. He recounts:

This performance can be considered the first modern play by the Chinese people. I was deeply influenced by it. I already read the Chinese translation of *Camille* in Peking. This performance only highlights the last two scenes when Armand’s father visits Marguerite on her deathbed. The story was heart wrenching, and had a strong

⁵¹ See Song Hwee Lim, *Celluloid comrades representations of male homosexuality in contemporary Chinese cinemas* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2006), 76.

⁵² After Ouyang leaves Tokyo for his hometown at Guiling, he wanders around in the wonderful nature there and often indulges himself in a poetic mood, emulating Qu Yuan’s poetic sensibility. For example, he says, “I hope, in no time, I can become a beautiful man with a grandiose voice to sing as a *laosheng* (the old gentleman type), and in the next second, I can become a stunning beauty with eyes as bright as diamonds to catch people’s soul with one look. I also hope I can have the prowess of tigers and the charm of a lady’s smile to make flowers blossom, outshine real beauties and tame demons. With these characteristics, as long as I get on stage occasionally, the country will be governed and the universe will be in harmony” (translation mine). See Ouyang, *Zi wo yan xi yi lai*, 25.

bearing on my mind. I was very surprised to realize that theatre can be done in such a fashion! But I was murmuring to myself in my mind, thinking that if I were to play this female role, I would have done a better job than Mr. Li. It also came to my mind that they were all students from colleges and universities. If acting by them is acceptable and popular among the audience, why can't I also participate? So I became interested in approaching those people. After asking around, I found out they all belong to a social club, the Spring Willow Society.⁵³

In Ouyang's account, two things are worth further analysis here. First, Ouyang tells us that before the performance, he already knows the story of *Camille* very well. The translation of *Camille* is an important literary and cultural event in China's passage into modernity. First, it creates a collective space for the reading public to imagine an outside culture that is different, but at the same time similar to, the changing social imaginary in China. Second, the highly emotionally charged depictions of *Camille* are literary devices that mobilize public sentiments for social cohesion. In its sympathies for *Camille*, the emerging Chinese reading public starts to imagine a modern world that reconfigures the boundaries of cultural imaginations. This reconfiguration further coincides with the new formation of the public/private divide in modern Chinese society.⁵⁴ One will not be surprised to see why the students choose this play as a rallying point for fundraising. If *Camille* has entered the realm of public sentiments among the Chinese reading public, the students' conscious or unconscious choice of this play might be a reflection of their intent to arouse public sympathy for their wretched compatriots by way of *Camille*. Li's

⁵³ Ibid., p. 7.

⁵⁴ See Hu Ying's detailed analysis, especially how the form of femininity figured by *Camille* plays in this new formation of public sentimental culture. Hu, *Tales of translation*, 67–105.

performance of Camille, therefore, could be considered an appropriation of the Qu Yuan lore, evoking one's state of powerlessness for emphatic identification.

Ouyang's gaze towards this form of femininity, not following the law of patriarchal gaze, does not objectify this form of femininity as an object of desire; rather, his gaze, as I will demonstrate later, leads to a disruption between identification and dis-identification. This has larger implications for us to understand how Ouyang's theatrical constructions of femininity allow him to go beyond an act of "masquerade," which I will discuss later. This sentimental identification with Camille/Li further encourages him to pursue the career of female impersonation, a career that is considered a despicable choice for traditional Chinese literati. Traditionally, actors are usually those from the lowest stratum of the society. As objects of pleasure and entertainment, the actors have very low social status; their social status is similar to bondsmen who do not have individual freedom and have to depend on the auspices and patronage of the rich and the powerful. Considering acting as a debased line of profession, the politically minded and upwardly mobile Chinese literati would never be involved in professional acting. For the most part, they participate in the creation process as a connoisseur, using theatre as a form of emotional expression or seeking inspiration from the actors/prostitutes.⁵⁵ When Ouyang saw a well-educated college student like Li Sutong perform on the stage with confidence, he was encouraged to dedicate to this form of art without the burden of traditional societal expectation. Traditionally, Chinese literati are encouraged to use the lyrical medium of

⁵⁵ See Colin Mackerras, *The Chinese Theatre in Modern Times: From 1840 to the Present Day*. London: Thames and Hudson, 1975, pp.78-81.

poems, as the Qu Yuan lore tradition indicates, to express their feminine sentimentality. This poetic license endows them with a moral high ground to seek justice. Here, Ouyang takes a step further to *embody* such a sentiment, deciding to act out his innate penchant for sentimentality.

After this production, Ouyang joins the Spring Willow Society and in the following years, together with the students, he presents a series of plays in different venues in Tokyo University—*Camille* (1907), *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1907), *The Painter and His Sister* (1908), and *Tosca* (1909)—which are all adaptations of popular melodramas from Europe and America. These productions have now been canonized as the progenitors of modern Chinese theatre in mainstream historiographies of Chinese modern theatre. Many interpretations pay attention to the undertones of national sympathy in their choices, foregrounding the question of national crisis in their renditions of these Euro-American melodramas.⁵⁶ Aside from the use of public sentiment in *Camille* as I analyzed above, *Tosca* is often interpreted as a deliberate deployment of the revolutionary theme, an appropriation aiming to raise the Chinese students' awareness about political change. Indeed, the hyperbolic emotions in these melodramatic plays are the reasons why the students are drawn to them in the first place. Their gravitation towards this corpus of plays, on the one hand, might be a consequence of the contemporaneous circulation of cultural forms. On the other, I contend, their choices are informed by the aesthetics of traditional Chinese operatic form. That is to say, they are attracted by these melodramas

⁵⁶ See Sen Ma, *Xi chao xia de Zhongguo xian dai xi ju* (Taipei Shi: Shu lin chu ban chu ban you xian gong si, 1994).

for the *affective* rather than the narrative aspects of them. Years later when Ouyang recalls their production of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, he interprets it as a choice to evoke national sympathy, attributing its success to “the tears of the audience for Tom.”⁵⁷ Their emphasis on the affective aspects of theatre resonates with traditional Chinese opera's aesthetics. As Haiping Yan carefully analyzes, traditional Chinese theatre upholds the concept of *qing*⁵⁸ (feelings, emotions, sentiments) as its primal element. The charm of traditional Chinese theatre does not lie in the process of figuring out plot movement for the audience; it attracts people because it theatricalizes moments of emotional tension when one's ethical existence is out of joint with the norm. Through hyperbolizing this tension, new ways of thinking about ethics are suggested.⁵⁹ In light of Yan's analysis, The Spring Willow Society's choice of melodrama can be considered as a continuation rather than rupture of this theatrical tradition. In the midst of world change when they feel out of joint with preexisting orders, the students attempt to affectively understand their way out of this political turmoil. As existing literary analysis of the popularity of Lin Shu's translation of *Camille* has shown, this emerging realm of public sentiments has cultural significance. As Leo Lee contends, it signifies the advent of sentimental literature

⁵⁷ See Ouyang Yuqian, *Ouyang Yuqian quan ji. di liu juan* (Shanghai: Shanghai wenyi chubanshe, 1990), 154.

⁵⁸ This is a concept that cannot be easily translated into an English equivalent. Many studies have attempted to understand how this concept figures in larger Chinese culture, conceptually as well as historically. I do not embrace an essentialized understanding of this term as a culturally specific concept but look at this concept as a possible critical valence in relation to the changing historical conditions. That is, this concept, regardless of its specific cultural source, goes through transformations as new modes of thinking are introduced into China, especially in the long 20th century when Western notions of romantic love and passion are introduced. See Lee, *Revolution of the Heart*.

⁵⁹ Haiping Yan, “Theatricality in Classical Chinese Drama,” in Tracy C Davis and Thomas Postlewait, *Theatricality* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 65–89.

in China, an advent heralding in the birth of modern subjectivity based upon authentic feelings.⁶⁰

Indeed, the students' production of *Camille* does not stage the whole plot. They are quite satisfied with showcasing the last two scenes in which the emotional climax of the plot is located and the moral message is made explicit. The moral sentimentalism in European sentimental fiction and melodrama interestingly caters to the students' original understanding of the function of theatre. Li Sutong, when rehearsing this performance, paid so much attention to the intricate bodily movements and facial expressions of Camille. On the one hand, he attempts to make it as realistic as possible. But this kind of attention to nuanced expressions and gestures is after all to ensure the affective effects of the performance—they should be so properly calculated and executed that the audience's feelings can be aroused and the intended moral and political messages can be sent out. The theatricality of morality is at the heart of such a performance. With figures of European sentimental women, such as Camille and Tosca, and the images of African American slaves in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, The Spring Willow Society attempts to evoke feelings and sentiments among its targeted audience. But what kind of sentimental education is intended? Even though many scholars uphold the purpose of fostering national sympathy as their primary purpose, it would be an overstatement to suggest that as the only purpose.

Furthermore, as Ouyang's account shows, in staging *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, they

⁶⁰ See Lee, *The romantic generation of modern Chinese writers*.

inserted a lot of carnival-like elements, on the one hand, to allow participants to showcase their talents and, on the other, to lighten up the heavy mood of the play.⁶¹ In addition, as the national revolutionaries were still confined to the underground scene, the students could not be too explicit with an agenda of fostering a national community with their performances. For me, a nationalistic reading of their choices is retroactively informed. I look at their performances as experimentations with theatricalized feelings, a staging practice that helps them to figure out new ethico-political orders in a future community to come, or an affective community in the process of coming into being. This kind of theatrical attempt to recuperate a collapsing existing ethico-political order is in line with many early theatre reformers' political agendas.

The Coming Communities of Feelings

At the turn of the 20th century, theatre reformation was never merely a task of stylistic renovation; a grander purpose of social transformation always underwrote various efforts to revamp theatrical forms. As Chen Duxiu's pronouncement—theatre must serve as the grand cathedral for the people; actors must work as the educators for the people⁶²—indicates, theatre and performance were picked up by the reformist intellectuals as a vehicle for the “spiritual transformation” of the people. What transformations do they exactly aim for? How can theatres, as their plans and visions of

⁶¹*Ou Yang Yu Qian Quan Ji: Di Liu Juan*. Shang hai: Shang hai wen yi chu ban she, 1990,p.151-152.

⁶² Chen Duxiu makes this political statement in “On Traditional Theatre,” an article published in the second edition of *Xin Xiaoshuo* (New Fiction) in 1905.

reforms suggest, achieve these goals? An excerpt of a theatre reform manifesto from Liu Yazhi is worth quoting here:

My feelings were hurt. Looking around, the mountains and rivers are dead. The barbarians have occupied the land, while *guoming* (the people of the state) are as degenerate as usual. Public virtues are not restored, and the building of solidarity is impossible. If we do not gear up ourselves, how can we redeem this lost cause? In the boundless land of the Middle Kingdom, no good news travels. Those desolate literati can only dwell in regrets and resentments in their midlives. The *yuebu* (the harmonica sector) in the southern city, nevertheless, exists outside of this world of darkness, shimmering with beams of lights. Donned with fine feathers and shiny pearls, the city dwellers awaken the dreaming state with celestial songs and graceful dance, calling the soul of *zhuguo* (ancestors' land or motherland). The three color flag of America shows up among the revolutionaries in the Pear Garden (a traditional term indexing the theatre community).⁶³

Drafted by Liu Yazhi (1887-1958), an intellectual in the early Republican era, this manifesto is the mission statement of the earliest modern theatre journal in China, *The Greatest Stage of the 20th Century*. Scholars can easily observe the explicit nationalistic sentiments in this passage. Judging by its explicit patriotism, we can conclude that Liu and his intellectual cohort, similar to Liang Qichao, aim to create a new theatre primarily for the purpose of nation building. Nevertheless, it would be a mistake to understand their ideas as an outright appropriation of the arts as an ideological apparatus. They do not attempt to transform people's political consciousness but, as the passage reveals, public

⁶³ *Zhongguo Xi Qu Zhi: Shanghai Juan*. Peking: Zhongguo ISBN zhong xin, 1996, pp 742-743.

virtues and sentiments are their targets. To understand this affective aspect, I would like to draw attention to two features of this quote: 1), its style of articulation, and 2), its vision of the ideal future theatre. With dense descriptions of the phenomenological world, the narrator expresses his innermost feelings through the desolate landscapes he poetically paints. These descriptions obviously attempt to affect the targeted readers with the grievances, solitude and despair of the narrator. The rhetorical power of this passage appeals to an affective way of communication—that is, it does not try to persuade the readers with logos, but rather *pathos*. In so doing, the narrator evokes the Chinese lyrical tradition—a literary tradition that critiques the prevailing ethico-political order through poetic correspondences between the cosmic forces and the poet’s ontological state. As David Wang’s interpretation of the lyrical tradition, *à la* Sheng Congwen, suggests, this tradition is ontological/cosmological as well as historical/political, which, once again, can be traced back to the Qu Yuan lore in *Chu Ci*.⁶⁴ Examined in its stylistic features, Liu Yazhi’s theatre reform manifesto is by all means a 20th century version of the Qu Yuan lore. The readers can peek into the inner resentments and grievances of the narrator through the emotionally charged descriptions of the landscape; this poetic connection ultimately leads to a lyrical pondering over the past and future of the political realities.

The affective rhetoric of politics, therefore, entails a personal emotional dimension in one’s pursuit of an ideal polis. In other words, politics does not entail rational public discussions and deliberations; it first and foremost concerns social belongings and

⁶⁴ See Dewei Wang, *Xian dai shu qing chuan tong si lun* (Taipei Shi: Taiwan da xue chu ban zhong xin, 2011), 7–13.

feelings. Here, Liu is making references to the Confucian tradition of *Liyue* (Rituals and Music), a tradition premising the harmony of political order upon proper implements of rituals and music. The term, “*Libengyuehuai*”, (literally meaning rituals collapse and music degenerates) is usually used to indicate an era of political turmoil when no laws and orders reign. Liu’s appropriation of theatre is to restore public virtues through “celestial songs and graceful dance.” Theatre, in Liu’s formulation, becomes a vehicle to restore the Rituals and Music—the aesthetic forms that can revive the old customs and bring back “the soul of the ancestors’ land.”

Liu’s view of theatre reform is by no means a single case. It is very common for theatre reformers to deploy emotionally inflected rhetorical strategies to put forth their visions and ideas of future theatres. The most common term utilized by these theatre reformists is *yifengyisu* (meaning “changing ethos and transforming customs”)⁶⁵, a term indexing the Confucian notion of aesthetics as a mode of moral sentimentalism. Such a concept builds harmonious social and political order upon the pleasurable feelings brought by the appropriate usages of proper music. As this term shows up in the classic *XunZi*, it already connotes the function of moral sentimentalism in music:

When the Ancient Kings created their music, they aimed to cultivate feelings of reverence in ritual ceremonies, of kinship between families and communities, and of obedience between young and old. Their music broadened everyone who heard it, added dignity, and taught cooperation, deference, and obedience. Music creates

⁶⁵ For example, the mission statement of The Spring Willow Society also explicitly prioritizes this goal. Other examples include the manifesto of “Custom Changing Club” and a dictum on traditional opera in an article published by Chen Duxiu in the second edition of *Xin Xiaoshuo* (New Fiction) in 1905.

harmony in a community, state, or nation because it affects all men the same way, since they share the same nature and have the same emotions. By regulating music, the sage kings directly addressed men's nature; through the influence of music, the good impulses in this nature were emphasized and evil sentiments repressed, man was transformed, and social harmony became possible.⁶⁶

Situating this term in the context of this excerpt, we can easily observe what role music, as a representative of the aesthetic realm, in traditional Confucian doctrines should play. It is a means for the sage king to create coherence between his feelings and that of the commoners. Social consolidation and political stabilization cannot be achieved through a top down imposition of divine will. Solidarity and harmony must be hinged on the dissemination of the right kind of music among the folks. This music is right because it pleases the sage king and moves the folks at the same time. A shared sphere of sentiments that connects the king and the commoners is the premise of a harmonious society. In sum, politics and ethics are symbiotic. What can guarantee this symbiotic correspondence is proper aesthetics, the use of which can help to cultivate virtues among people and sustain moral orders.

Therefore, the New Theatre, in these early reformers' formulations, does not seem to be iconoclastic. Following the Confucian tradition of *liyue* (music and rite), it assumes the intertwined relationships between politics and aesthetics, retaining the view that politics is always already an aestheticized harmonious collectivity. However, in the context of early Theatre reform, a new tension rises in this continuous appropriation of

⁶⁶ Xunzi and John Knoblock, *Xunzi: a translation and study of the complete works* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1988), 79.

the moral sentimentalism. If, in traditional theatre, this form of affective politics very much helps the sustaining of the Confucian ethico-political order, how then is this affective politics reconfigured in such a historical juncture when the old system is undergoing severe challenges?

This is where I return to the historical and cultural significance of the Spring Willow Society's transcultural practice of Euro-American melodramas. Far from being outright nationalistic, its appropriation of the *pathos* inhabited by those sympathetic figures does not directly foster a Chinese national identity. Rather, in the members' transcultural affective appropriation, they are experimenting with a new form of selfhood and community at a historical moment when the Confucian ethico-political cosmology of the *Qing* dynasty is severely challenged by a Western civilization equipped with modern knowledge and technology. If Confucianism very much depends on a moral sentimentalism for its sustainability, the students' experimenting with Euro-American melodramatic sentimentalism might be an attempt to seek a continuation from the old to the new through an affective route. In short, they are aiming to foster a new community of feelings out of the old Confucian paradigm. Theatre, as an affective public space, becomes the most convenient and effective apparatus for those intellectual reformers to create a new realm of public sentiments for, to borrow Joshua Goldstein's term, a new "community of *qing*" to emerge.⁶⁷

⁶⁷ Goldstein analyzes Wang Guowei's and Wu Mei's theories and histories of Chinese theatre. He observes that in their mission to reconstruct and redeem Chinese traditional theatre, they both identify genuine emotion as the central element in the aesthetics of Chinese theatre. Genuine feelings, as Wang and Wu analyze, not only function to make the audience emphasize with the characters but also serve to glue the social sphere together as a community. Goldstein further points out that the May Fourth intellectuals'

As part of the formation of this larger community of feelings on the stage of the Republican China, the Spring Willow Society tries to re-anchor a Chinese subject that is out of joint with the modern world through an embodied imagination of the West. The public sentiments in these Euro-American plays index a marginalized individual's or depersonalized subject's suffering and striving to gain personhood in the modern world, and thus the Society's interpretations translate this politics of sentimentality into a local context. I turn back to Ouyang in order to examine how this might work.

Ouyang starts his theatre career with impersonating the images of “fallen women” from these European melodramas. If we analyze the politics of representations of the fallen women in its European context, we will understand how these seemingly sympathetic images are actually in the service of a liberalist bourgeois male ideology—that is, the emerging divide of the public and private sphere demarcated along the gendering effect of rational and emotional lives. Sentimentalized femininity, either in the images of the fallen woman or the suffering woman, in early Europe-American context is created to reflect the interests of a rising bourgeois patriarchal society, which confines femininity in the domestic sphere and subjects it to affective labor. A masculine rational thinking subject emerges along with the reification of a male-exclusive public sphere, while these “public women” are created as metaphors of “fallen-ness” or “suffering” to support an automatic and self-sufficient view of modern male selfhood.⁶⁸

stress on genuine emotions and vernacular language as the principles of literary writing, in light of the continuous tradition of *qing*, cannot be considered as a radical break from the Chinese tradition but a continuation. See Joshua Goldstein, *Drama kings: players and publics in the re-creation of Peking opera, 1870-1937* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), 138–145.

⁶⁸ Ann Cvekovich studies sensation novels in the mid 19th century and concludes that, “the association of

In impersonating these female images, is Ouyang unwittingly participating a similar male ideology? Is he appropriating these images for the purpose of reconstituting a modern Chinese subject that is first and foremost male? To answer these questions, let me first turn to a corpus of popular performances that emerged in urban Shanghai since the 1910s.

Republican Family Drama and Its Gender Politics

In existing historiographies of early Chinese New Theatre, many historians have pointed out a sudden outburst of *Jiatingju* (family drama) in the 1910s, especially in the metropolitan areas in Shanghai.⁶⁹ In these historians' use of the term, *Jiatingju* is usually limited to a corpus of works produced in the 1910s by *Xinming She* (The New People Society), *Mingming She* (The Honing People Society) and other commercialized New Theatre groups. These plays, usually improvised, are characterized by their improbable plots, excessive emotional appeals, and intricate family relationships. Involving incest, murder, or adultery, these plays often showcase the destruction of a family either by illicit desires or unstoppable historical forces. Nevertheless, these destructions, far from leading

femininity with emotional excess underwrites, for example, the nineteenth-century production of ideologies of domesticity, which depend on the construction of the middle-class woman as responsible for and ideally suited to the affective labors to be performed in the home." Ann Cvetkovich, *Mixed feelings feminism, mass culture, and Victorian sensationalism* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1992), 25. While Cvetkovich reveals the politics of affect surrounding representations of ideal middle-class womanhood, Amanda Anderson studies the changing images of the fallen woman and succinctly suggests that the images of the fallen woman "should be understood principally in relation to a normative masculine identity seen to possess the capacity for autonomous action, enlightened rationality, and self-control." See Amanda Anderson, *Tainted souls and painted faces: the rhetoric of fallenness in Victorian culture* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993), 31.

⁶⁹ Benxiang Tian, *Zhongguo xian dai bi jiao xi ju shi* (Beijing: Wen hua yi shu chu ban she, 1993), 8. Aihua Huang, *Zhongguo zao qi hua ju yu Riben: Zhongguo xi ju xian dai hua chu qi jie jian xi fang xi ju de qu zhe li cheng* = *China's early drama and Japan* (Changsha: Yue Lu shu she, 2001), 151–153.

to a tragic view of fatalism, always morph into a spiritual triumphalism that reintroduces moral orders. What lie at the heart of these family melodramas are usually the trials and tribulations of a decaying father—a patriarch endangered by external forces.

This sudden outburst of family drama in China is symptomatic of the Chinese collective's feeling of disorientation in the midst of modernity's sea change. The rise of the melodramatic imagination in the West, according to Peter Brooks, is a "modern sensibility," in which the absolute realm of God's kingdom gives its way to "the Promethean search to illuminate man's quotidian existence."⁷⁰ The melodramatic form is an expression picked up in the West to help anchor a modern man's way of morality in a new cosmos without God's absolute transcendence. The historical rise of family drama in 1910's Shanghai shares a similar attempt—that is, when the old Confucian system is disintegrating, these family dramas are staged to seek its possible relevance for the current moment. While the rise of the nuclear family and individuality plays a central component in Western melodramas, those Shanghai family dramas still hold onto the old Confucian paradigm—a moral sentimentalism that places the individual's moral standing along the family-society-politics axis. As the late imperial Confucian system is undergoing serious challenges, the emergence of these family dramas, as a form of popular culture, shows us how this culture, through imagined disintegrations and reformations of the old familial structure, seeks to understand what roles the family should play in the midst of political sea change.

⁷⁰ Brooks, *The melodramatic imagination*, 21.

In telling the stories of waning Confucian patriarchs in the midst of world change, are those family dramas simply lamenting the disappearance of the old patriarch? Or are they attempting to recuperate its potency? What kind of gender politics can we tease out from them, especially where the newly minted image of “New Woman” is concerned? I will discuss these questions with an analysis of two of the most popular family dramas during this time period—*Sea of Regrets* (1910) and *The Tales of Family Woes and Happiness* (1912).

Adapted from Wu Woyao’s eponymous sentimental novel, the theatrical version of *Sea of Woes* was first created by Qian Fengxin in the Evolutionary Theatre Club. Later subsequently revised and curtailed by Zheng Zhengqiu and Wang Youyou, the theatrical version was finalized and became a popular part of the repertoire among New Theatre troupes. Not so different from its fictional predecessor, the theatrical version tells the romance between Zhang Dihua and Chen Bohe, a couple of young lovers brought together by arranged marriage between two prestigious families in Beijing. Right before tying the nuptial knot, the young couple, due to the political turmoil caused by the Boxer Uprising, is separated and dispersed in two different places. While Dihua, the young lady, manages to settle in Shanghai with her surviving father, Bohe becomes rich with strange fortunes, only to squander the money away by indulging himself in opium and illicit affair with a prostitute. As the story unfolds, the degenerate Bohe eventually gets reunited with Dihua only to cause further misfortune. With perseverant and persistent efforts to find Bohe, Dihua is determined to carry out her virtuous duty by completing the nuptial

bond with Bohe. The final reunion of the two star-crossed lovers, tragically, leads to a permanent separation. Bohe, now an opium addict inflicted with syphilis and other illness, becomes an irredeemable liar and loser. The multiple attempts made by Dihua and her father to save him from the abyss of opium addiction only prove to be total failure as Bohe can not rise up from the misery of opium smoking. He eventually ends up in the hospital and passes away with repentance, right after Dihua expresses her benevolent forgiving and whole-hearted devotion to him. If Dihua's unwavering love serves as a form of redemption for Bohe's downfall, her decision to spend the rest of her life in the nunnery brings about the final triumph of the Confucian virtue of constancy—a spiritual triumphalism to overcome the degeneration, as embodied by Bohe, brought about by the political disorder in late Qing China.

At first glance, the “romance” between Dihua and Bohe is a testimony of the ultimate pursuit of true love. However, as Haiyan Lee points out, the true love between this couple of star-crossed lovers, far from a celebration of the Romantic concept of “free love” that is embraced in the May Fourth era, is nothing but a validation of the Confucian moral view of marriage and gender roles.⁷¹ Not unlike her counterparts in traditional theatre (e.g. Dou E, Zhao Wunian), Dihua is an embodiment of the Confucian ethical codes of filiality, chastity and submissive femininity. As Tani Barlow points out, in the late imperial Chinese Confucian Chinese society, a woman is ethically positioned in relational terms; that is, her existence is first and foremost defined by the family and

⁷¹ Lee, *Revolution of the Heart*, 66–75.

social roles she has to play in relation to the patriarchal kinship system. Barlow explicates:

Between the eighteenth and the early twentieth-century cultural revolutions, the dominant, formulaic historical catachresis in mainstream Confucian regulative gender theory projects was *funü*. *Funü* signified the collectivity of kinswomen in the semiotics of Confucian family doctrine. Confucian family philosophy was a specialized style of theoretical patriline, and the patriline in all Confucian thought was held to be the literal foundation of the central government.⁷²

Here, to consider the feminine subjectivity of Dihua per the observation of Tani Barlow, one should situate her agency in the patrilineal kinship system of Confucianism. Dihua's unwavering devotion to Bohe, rather than a personal choice against all odds, is a result of her steadfast belief in the Confucian codifications of virtuous femininity. Dihua, full of piety, religiously pursues her conjugal knot with Bohe, so much so that she stands against her father's advice and seeks to fulfill her wifely duty either through death or abstinence. Examined in this light, her assertion of will against her father does not make her a heroine of individualistic will to power. Her seemingly staunch decision to exit the mundane world is a testament to the virtues of chastity and constancy demanded by the Confucian codes of ideal wifedom. In the play, this aspect of moral sentimentalism is repeatedly emphasized through scenarios when Dihua is caught in moments of emotional striving. For example, when Dihua first learns about Bohe's downfall, the play exploits the

⁷² Tani E Barlow, *The question of women in Chinese feminism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004), 37.

affective tension of this moment of discovery only to establish Dihua as a woman of unquestionable virtues.

Zhang Dihua: (Stands up and greets) Dad, you are back.

(The Dad does not answer but sits on the second chair with a sorrowful expression. The servants enter the inner chamber. Dihua fetches a hukka for her father)

Zhang Dihua: Dad, smoke. (The Dad takes over the hukka. He is still quiet and surly. The servant offers him tea but he refuses to drink it. Upon seeing this, Dihua asks again)

Zhang Dihua: Dad, why are you so unhappy today? What do you have in mind? You don't smoke; nor do you drink tea. What makes you so unhappy?

Zhang Haoting: (Still quiet. He looks at Dihua and rolls up a piece of paper and stuffs it in the pipe. Sigh) Aie...(He moves to the third chair and punches the table)

Zhang Dihua: (Upon seeing her father's reaction, she starts to feel uneasy and questions herself if she has done anything wrong. Perplexed, she slowly walks over to face her father) Dad! (now with a sorrowful expression herself) Did I do anything wrong? Is it because of some wrong doings of mine that you become so angry? (The Dad looks into his daughter's eyes. Feeling sad, he stands up, almost telling her the truth but stopping right away. He crosses over to the fifth chair and sits down. He frowns, seeming to fall into deep thoughts.) (Translation Mine)⁷³

The play prolongs the moment of final discovery by escalating the emotional tension

⁷³ Since most of these plays were improvised without a set script. The text I use in this chapter is based upon a published version that is narrated by an old actor who was involved in the production before. See Wang, Weimin. "Henhai," in Weimin Wang, *Zhongguo zao qi hua ju xuan* (Beijing: Zhongguo xi ju chu ban she : Xin hua shu dian Beijing fa xing suo fa xing, 1989), 152–153.

between Dihua and her father. This accumulation of tension eventually leads to the final outburst of the unbearable fact accompanied by the emotional outpouring of Dihua. Through this prolongation, the play capitalizes on the emotions of shock, sadness and pain aroused by this scenario. More than a scenario informing the movement of plots, this prolonged process of revealing the truth serves to reinforce the virtuous image of Dihua. The sentimental effects achieved here call for the tears of the audience with the purpose of inscribing in their minds the image of Dihua as a virtuous woman who bears an unflinching faith and love towards her husband-to-be.

After hearing about Bohe's downfall, Dihua, instead of finding fault with him, begs her father to redeem him from the miserable state. She emphatically begs,

This is indeed good news. He comes from a well-to-do family. But now he is in trouble. Dad, please think of any possible way to save him. He is your subordinate by age and will certainly follow your teachings if you give him proper guidance. Please give him a chance and he will become a changed person. Isn't it a good thing to show him a brightly path?⁷⁴

Dihua's father, nevertheless, feels hesitant about saving him. It is only after Dihua's repeated begging and emotional persuasions that he eventually agrees to do so. In the following part, the play deploys another dramatic device to reinforce the sentimental appeal of this moral message—repetition. In order to reinforce the virtuous image of Dihua, the play repeatedly stages the failure of Bohe's rehabilitation. In each failed

⁷⁴ Ibid., 154-155.

attempt, the emotional confrontation between Dihua and her father is recurrently staged again. These repetitions, building up the intensity of affective appeals to the audience, take the sentimental effects to another level by solidifying the contrasting images of Dihua and Bohe—the waning virility of masculinity versus the persisting force of femininity. This contrasting of gendered virtues eventually culminates in the final scene when Dihua tries her last attempt to bring her betrothed husband back from the brink of destruction, only to no avail. Once again, the play exploits the sentimental potentials of this farewell scene to its fullest for the sake of reemphasizing Dihua’s image as a virtuous woman.

Zhang Dihua: (upon seeing Bohe, slightly moves his body; she gently calls him) Bohe, are you awake? Take some medicine. (No response, Bohe inhales) Bohe, I am here to see you. Please wake up. (Still no response. Dihua pours the medicine into the pot and uses it to feed Bohe. Failing to take in the fluid, Bohe clenches his teeth with the medicine spilled over his mouth. Dihua is extremely anxious. She looks around and sees no one is watching. She, instead, feeds Bohe the medicine with her own mouth, and then wipes off his mouth with her handkerchief. Upon seeing Bohe exhale and toss his body, she gently caresses his chest and calls out) Bohe, do you feel better now? I am here to see you. Please take care of yourself well. I am here to take care of you too. Bohe, (after taking in the medicine, Bohe slowly opens his eyes) Bohe, do you recognize me?⁷⁵ (translation mine)

What is worth noting in the excerpt above is not the speech but rather the details of

⁷⁵ Ibid., 176.

Dihua's stage direction. Like the technique of prolongation analyzed before, the final scene also deploys a similar strategy to yield maximum sentimental effects. Here, the prolongation also helps to accumulate emotional intensity. It allows the audience to witness the inner emotional states of Dihua by making her anxiety, distress and sense of guilt explicit through the prolonged medicine feeding process. What stands out in this process is her decision to feed Bohe medicine with her own mouth. Previously, during the time of political turmoil, the two, along with Zhang's family, were running away from the mobs. In the midst of chaos, Dihua still insists on the rule of no physical intimacy before marriage and asks Bohe not to sit in the same carriage with her on their way to Shanghai. This decision, nevertheless, causes the two to be separated. Blaming herself for causing Bohe's downfall, Dihua, at this moment of urgency, obviously lets go of her insistence on this moral code and decides to feed Bohe with her own mouth. Nevertheless, her looking around still proves her to be a woman who strictly follows the codes of conduct, despite the way in which her true love enables her to transgress this moral demand temporarily. Still, it would be a mistake to read this moment as a manifestation of Dihua's unswerving true love towards Bohe. As she only transgresses the moral code in the condition that no other people are present, her devoted love to Bohe is not a Romantic obsession out of personal desire. Her "true love" is a token of the virtuous principles of Confucian womanhood. Her devotion to Bohe, rather than an attachment to him as an individual, is after all a persisting faith in the sacredness of the ethical category of husband and wife within the Confucian kinship system. This is further validated by her final decision to

renounce any worldly pleasures. In her worldview, only the sanctuary of abstinence motivated by religion can preserve the sacred intactness of this unfulfilled conjugal obligation.

Zhang Dihua: Dad, I grew up with Bohe since I was a little kid. We studied together and shared similar personality traits. We are meant for each other since our births! After we grew up, we became an engaged couple. In order to obey the code of moral conducts, we had to detach from each other physically. This detachment more or less creates a distance between us but our hearts still go to each other. We are still spiritually united. Last time during our escape, due to my insistence on the moral code of no physical intimacy, I let him go away to look for his friend Li Fu. Unfortunately, this decision led to a separation between us and caused this misfortune. “I did not kill Bohe but Bohe died because of me”—this has become lifetime regret for me. Shouldn’t I take full responsibility for his death? My wish is to leave this world with him, but this decision will certainly break your heart. As to the question of producing offspring for the Zhang family, I hope Dad can marry a new wife, who can not only take care of you in the rest of your life but also give birth to babies, continuing the bloodline of our family. Dad, I have made up my mind. If you don’t give me your consent, I will choose to die! (Crying and then kneeling down) Dad, if you really love your daughter and hope I can keep on living, please let me go to the nunnery.⁷⁶

This long speech is created for the audience to dwell and linger on the overt sentimentality of this moment. The emotions evoked by this pathetic moment do not help

⁷⁶ Ibid., 180.

the audience to sympathize with the impossible true love between Bohe and Dihua. They are unquestionably virtuous feelings that secure the legitimacy of moral codes—namely the codes of filiality, loyalty and female chastity—of the Confucian patrilineal kinship system. The ending tableau of the father-daughter embrace seems to deviate from the happy endings of most traditional Chinese theatre, which serve to reintroduce the ethical order through exuberantly joyful moments of reunification. The failure of the father to restore the completeness of the kinship system, nevertheless, is not dwelled on as a pessimistic closure of fatal resignation. On the contrary, the father's seemingly diminished power to sustain the legitimacy of the kinship structure is amended by Dihua's ultimate execution of her moral duties.

If we look at the historical background of the Boxer Uprising as an indication of modernity's challenge towards the Confucian regime, the popularity of *Sea of Regrets* in the 1910s tells us how popular culture faces such a waning of traditional orthodox values. If the male figures—Bohe representing the encroachment of modernity's assault against male virility and civility, and Haoting representing an aging powerless patriarch---in this play attest to the irrevocable declining of the patriarchal power, Dihua's tenacious will power, though not an indication of her subjectivity, helps the disoriented audience to feel comforted about the persisting relevance of the old orthodox tradition. The tragic feelings in this sentimental play do testify to the shocks, distress, and daze caused by modernity's disruptive reorganization of family and social lives. While the ordeals of the father and the husband foreshadow the imminent collapse of the Confucian family-state

system, the aura of the virtuous Dihua reassures the agonized public via the final moment of sentimental triumph.

In a similar vein, *The Tales of Family Woes and Happiness*, another popular domestic drama during the 1910s in Shanghai, also tries to compromise the increasing threat of modernity with the relevance of traditional moral orthodoxy. This play features the father figure, Wang Bo Liang, whose journey of self-indulgence and repentance is allegorical of the downfall and redemption of Confucian patriarchy. The story tells of Wang's obsession with a courtesan named Little Red Peach, who sets up a nuptial scheme to entrap Wang for financial purposes. As the story unfolds, Wang marries Little Red Peach and takes her back to his wealthy household to take over his deceased ex-wife's role. Little Red Peach, far from being a paragon of the Confucian feminine virtues of chastity and submissiveness, cheats on Wang with her secret lover, Li Jianzhai. What's even worse, she has been scheming to exhort Wang's money for her lover. As her scheme is going nowhere, she and Li eventually come up with a plan to poison Wang to death in order to receive all of all his family wealth. The plan, nevertheless, goes awry and gets exposed. Little Red Peach wittily twists the plot and convinces Wang that it is his son, Chong Shen, rather than herself, who tries to poison him. Chong Shen, in order to prove his integrity, commits suicide. His death causes his betrothed wife, Mei Xian, to go crazy and further leads to the collapse of the household. It is not until the two faithful servants reveal to Wang about Little Red Peach's evil side that Wang comes to a final revelation about the mistakes he made. Upon discovering the truth, Wang stabs Little Red

Peach to death on stage and, in response to a friend's suggestion, donates all his family wealth and devotes himself to the coming revolution.

To my knowledge, this play is not influenced by *The London Merchant*. Regardless of the possibility of intertextual cross-fertilization, this play strikingly shares many similar features with George Lillo's archetypal British melodrama--*The London Merchant* (1731). First, they both portray the downfall of a male figure whose downward spiral into the abyss of destruction is brought about by the false promise of true love by a prostitute. Second, this gradual descending into destruction is constructed as a process of the violation of moral codes. Third, it is all up to the help of the faithful servants that the schemes of the evil women are exposed. Last, the endings of both plays stage moments of repentance and redemption. In *The London Merchant*, it is a reaffirmation of Christian benevolence modified by the philanthropy of mercantile values. In *The Tales*, it is an assertion of nationalistic sentiments.⁷⁷

⁷⁷ To point out their similarities, I hope to showcase how *The Tales* uses a melodramatic plot structure and technique to achieve the same ideological purpose as *The London Merchant*. Often defined as the representative bourgeois domestic drama, *The London Merchant*, is considered by many critics as a morality play that replaces the cosmic fatalism in classical tragedies with emergent bourgeois mercantile sentiments. It tells the story of a merchant's apprentice, George Barnwell, who goes astray after falling into the love trap of the sexual predator—Sarah Millwood, a lady of pleasure. To realize the false hope of gaining Millwood's true love, Barnwell disobeys his master Thorowgood's rules, steals money from him and eventually makes a huge mistake by murdering his uncle for money. The play stages Barnwell's gradual downfall only to grant him a final redemption moment. After confessing his sin to his co-apprentice Truman, Barnwell in the long run is forgiven by his uncle, Thorowgood, and most important of all, by God, under the benevolent visit of a clergyman in the prison cell. While Barnwell repents his sin to be saved, the quintessential evil woman, Millwood, is also arrested by the police with the help of the conscientious servants.

As Gail Hart succinctly concludes, the formulaic plot structure and typological characterization in this play serves to secure a patriarchal moral system in the late 17th century and early 18th century when the rising bourgeois order requires stabilization after the dismantling of the aristocratic world. The designation of moral values along the gender line here, according to Hart, is not a singular case. It is quite common for European or British sentimental dramas around this time to stereotypically portray gender roles. The gender typology in these plays is part and parcel of the rising bourgeois ideology that splits the domestic and social spheres along the gender line. While the bourgeois order is made possible by the ideology of liberal

Both plays share one key component—the pursuit of true love and its implications for an emerging modern morality. According to Niclas Luhmann, the liberal recodifications of intimacy since the late 17th century can be seen in tandem with the rise of authentic selfhood. True love, as the ultimate code of intimacy between two individuals, presupposes a form of absolute communication that connects the innermost feelings and thoughts of two separated individuals.⁷⁸ While Luhmann leaves out how the codifications of gender play out in this historical process, Nancy Armstrong's study of domestic fiction and conduct books can supplement his perspective. Armstrong identifies how the institution of bourgeois marriage, despite a basis on an individually equitable relationship, entails a new power mechanism that delimits femininity within the domestic sphere, a sphere that is excluded from the realm of productivity in capitalist economy. This is the historical formation of modern gender politics that secures the gendered division of labor in bourgeois liberal society.⁷⁹

In light of the above analysis, we arrive at a new sexual morality with the institution

individualism, the ideological subordination of women is needed to secure the patriarchal advantage in this new social structure. See Gail Kathleen Hart, *Tragedy in paradise: family and gender politics in German bourgeois tragedy, 1750-1850* (Columbia, S.C.: Camden House, 1996).

⁷⁸ Luhmann further observes that the concept of true love gradually incorporates sexuality and gets institutionalized with the modern institution of monogamous marriage, a sacred form of intimate bond that is upheld as a guarantor of sexually based unification of two separate souls. From *passion amour* to Romantic love, the codifications of intimacy change as the semantics of love evolves. See Niklas Luhmann, *Love as passion: the codification of intimacy* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1986), 129–143.

⁷⁹ Armstrong says, “The modern female body comprised a grammar of subjectivity capable of regulating desire, pleasure, the ordinary care of the body, the conduct of courtship, the division of labor and the dynamic of family relationships. As such, the writing of female subjectivity opened a magical space in the culture where ordinary work could find its proper gratification and where the very objects that set men against one another in the competitive marketplace served to bind them together in a community of common domestic service...The household simultaneously recentered the scattered community at myriad points to form the nuclear family, a social organization with a mother rather than a father as its center.” See Armstrong, *Desire and domestic fiction*, 95.

of true love: if the new semantic of true love connotes the ultimate realization of one's individualistic existence, this realization can only be achieved if one, a male subject in these instances, has the capacity to distinguish "true love" from pure sensuality or illicit desire. *The London Merchant* is indeed a moral tale about the deceptive force of true love. If the sexual consummation between the two genders indicates the achievement of true love, Millwood, the *femme fatale* in the play, is constructed as the opposite to the ideal femininity (the virgin, the faithful wife and the loving mother) that is associated with true love. Millwood's femininity is presented as a threat to the consolidation of the horizontal world of bourgeois free trade and labor. As a lady of pleasure who deceives the leading male character with her sexual prowess, her deviant femininity outside of the domestic realm poses a threat to the male world of bourgeois mercantile gentility and civility, as Gail Hart succinctly sums up, "Lillo's democratic sentiments and felicitous calculus, aimed, as we shall see, at a community of men, reflect the economic discourse and spirit of commerce."⁸⁰ The sentimental moments of the final repentance and redemption by the male character are to set up such a gender ideology in the liberal bourgeois world.

The London Merchant, Millwood's deviant femininity is deployed to secure such a bourgeois ideology, then the role of The Little Red Peach in *The Tales* serves a similar function. Similarly, it is The Red Peach's false promise of love that deviates the Father from his dominion of Confucian ethics. This *femme fatale*'s entering into the household does not help the Father to properly replace the deceased Mother. On the contrary, the

⁸⁰ Hart, *Tragedy in paradise*, 26.

public-ness of her femininity, once brought into the interior of the Confucian family, will bring destruction of the entire kinship as the death of the Father's son testifies. The final repenting scene in *The London Merchant* restores the order of bourgeois patriarchy; the end of *The Tales* entails a similar recuperative attempt. The sacrificial death of the son brings the falling Father to come to a new revelation about his pitfalls. The chaos of this old Confucian patriarch's household will soon be restored along with the larger political purpose of Xinhai revolution. After his family has gone into ashes, the Father strikes his last pose to donate all his remaining wealth to the revolution and further dedicates himself to this monumental political action—a revolution that will eventually end the dynastic form and foster the birth of the first Chinese nation state—The Republic of China. *The Tales* dramatizes the inevitable disintegration of the old Confucian patriarchal order; nevertheless, it prevents a possible total annihilation by staging a final attempt of nationalistic reconstruction.

In the corpus of family dramas from the 1910s to the 1920s, similar political messages and gender politics prevail. They foreground the figure of an old Confucian patriarch, fabricating moral tales about his downfall and rebirth. Female images, along the traditional and modern divide, serve the function of sustaining or destroying this waning patriarchal order. Through this formulaic device, they function as moral and political allegories that sometimes seek to retain the relevance of the old system and sometimes intend a nationalistic message as solution. What lies at the heart of their ideological underpinning is the deployment of moral sentiments; similar to early

European drama of sensibility,⁸¹ they help a society at the brink of falling apart to reconstruct its ethical order, which ultimately serves a political function of rebuilding a community. The familial vicissitudes in those plays, rather than simply being incredulous plots for emotional indulgence, constitute important dramatic twists and turns to achieve the function of moral sentimentalism.

Nevertheless, as they emerge at a time of historical juncture when old Confucian moral system is declining, these family dramas, moralistic as they might seem, constitute an exciting cultural field where new possibilities might emerge. That is, to reintroduce Joshua Goldstein's concept, the community they seek to reconstruct is a community of *qing* to come, where sentimental educations are disseminated but at the same time affective disturbance ensues. In spite of their moral and political purposes, these plays, in their portrayals of new forms of human relationships, do open up avenues for transgressive desires and transformative possibilities. The narrative structure might force a moralistic closure upon the viewing public; nevertheless, the moments of transgression, once opened up, cannot be succinctly dealt away with. It is in the slippages between sentimental education and affective transformation that I situate my study of Ouyang Yuqian's female impersonation.

Not Just a Fallen Woman

⁸¹ See Ernest Bernbaum, *The drama of sensibility; a sketch of the history of English sentimental comedy and domestic tragedy, 1696-1780*, (Gloucester, Mass.: P. Smith, 1958).

Starting with those sentimental feminine figures in European melodrama, Ouyang Yuqian, after he returns to Shanghai, continues to be part of the New Theatre scene from the 1910s onwards. He persists in resuming female roles, especially the unconventional ones in these family dramas.⁸² For example, in *The Tales*, he willingly takes on the task of impersonating The Red Peach, a decision that draws severe criticism from serious cultural figures. Nevertheless, Ouyang dismisses this kind of moralistic judgment and embraces his decision as devotion to true art. In his memoir, Ouyang explicitly tells us:

When I was in The Spring Willow Theatre, I played all kinds of random characters. Most of the time, I played outgoing loose women. Sometimes, I played assertive female characters; sometimes, I played morally degenerate women....I also took over Huiren's role to play The Little Red Peach in *The Tales of Family Happiness and Woes*. This role was first assigned to Huiren because Mr. Weishi, Jiangro's father, thinks that Huiren can easily pull out immoral expressions, while I always appear to have a noble outlook. Even since, Jiangro never assigns this type of characters to me. I was unconvinced and determined to take on the task of enacting an immoral character that even Huiren would not play. I had been observing and memorizing the actions of these immoral women and was happy to use them all when I was rehearsing *The Tales*. After the show, a newspaper published a diatribe against my performance, saying "as a scholar, why would Ouyang debase himself to play the role of The Red Peach? He plays this role to the extent of verisimilitude, bringing an overtly flirtatious prostitute to life...". This kind of criticism is missing the meaning of theatre aesthetics. I, nevertheless, feel delighted by this criticism, thinking it is actually an endorsement of my efforts to emphatically portray this character.⁸³

⁸² Even though he harshly criticizes the value of these plays in his memoir, the hyperbolic sentimentality in these plays testifies to his penchant towards feminine sentimentality as I analyzed before.

⁸³ Ouyang, *Zi wo yan xi yi lai*, 48.

Despite the fact that Ouyang still distinguishes these female types into moral and immoral, his artistic belief nonetheless brings him out of this moralistic confine to emphatically portray those “immoral” females. I would like to point out that Ouyang’s deployment of emphatic identification makes his approach to female impersonation different from the traditional technique. Despite the arguments that Daphne Lei, Katherine Hui-ling Chou and Siyuan Liu all give, that is, that these early practices of female impersonation should be considered a historical convention stemming from the Japanese *onagota* and Chinese *dan* tradition,⁸⁴ I, nevertheless, contend that Ouyang’s approach, though an immediate legacy of the *dan* tradition, entails progressive and possibly subversive consequences, especially if we situate his unfailing devotion to female impersonation in the historical context from the 1910s to the 1930s.

His emphatic and realistic attempts to portray these female characters as truly as possible make his practice of female impersonation significantly different from the *dan* tradition for the *dan* tradition is primarily an act of mimicking from the outside. As begun by Wei Chang-sheng, the *dan* practice in Beijing opera, since its inception, aims at creating various forms of femininity through the execution of bodily movements, hand gestures and facial expressions. Types of painted faces, headsets, and costumes are further assigned to the proper lines of feminine types, e.g. the virtuous noble lady, the

⁸⁴ Liu refers to Lei and Chou to back up his argument and further suggests that it would be anachronistic to consider their practice “queer” given that the hetero/homosexual divide was not introduced to China until the 1930s when modern sexology came into China. Siyuan Liu, “Performing Gender at the Beginning of Modern Chinese Theatre,” *TDR/The Drama Review* 53.2 (2009): 35–50.

coquettish young lady and the demure peasant woman, solidifying typological and generic images of femininities.⁸⁵ *Dan* impersonation does not presuppose a psychological depth of the characters; it intends to physically enact the contours of femininity. The emotions coming from these characters cannot be considered psychologically felt states of these individualistic characters. These physically created female characters are first and foremost types, which represent ethical positions in the Confucian kinship structure. The emotions generated through their enactments of these roles, usually in tension with situations of ethical dilemmas, are virtuous sentiments that do not index the psyche of one individual role but the ethical relations among the roles. This type of sentiments are in line with what Haiyan Lee defines as “the Confucian structure of feelings,” an affective structure constructed with an ongoing pull between *li* (propriety) and *yu* (desire), which always ends with the restoration of a Confucian *liyue* order.⁸⁶ In light of Lee’s concept, *dan* impersonation does not index any connotations of personal psychological perversion; it is an aesthetic skill that functions to perpetuate feminine virtues in the Confucian ethico-political system.

Since his days in Tokyo, Ouyang has demonstrated an impersonation approach that departs from the *dan* tradition. His primary goal in this impersonating practice is to enter the psychic depth of the roles, an attempt that is only possible when the notion of a modern individual with psychological depth arrives. This desire to enter/become the other leads to an emphatic imitation, a practice of mimicry that depends on an opened

⁸⁵ See Min Tian, "Male Dan: the Paradox of Sex, Acting, and Perception of Female Impersonation in Traditional Chinese Theatre," *Asian Theatre Journal* 17.1 (2000): 78–97.

⁸⁶ Lee, *Revolution of the Heart*, pp. 25-50.

intersubjective space of liminality, where the existential boundaries between self and other are tentatively blurred and destabilized. It is his emphatic approach to know what women really are that allows him to exceed the Confucian structure of feelings that very much define the affective functions of the family dramas in the 1910s. If these typological characters primarily serve the purposes of organizing and stabilizing the intended ethico-political codes, Ouyang's unflinching desire to know the other, as in his statement about his belief that true art should go beyond good and evil, leads him to break out of such a confine of Confucian moral sentimentalism, furthering his impersonation into the realm of individualistic desire and genuine feelings.

This kind of emphatic orientation towards the other, in the language of Lacanian psychoanalysis, creates an ongoing process of phantasmatic identification, *à la* Judith Butler, an identification that eventually leads to "the failure of identificatory phantasms;" such a failure to comply with the law of the Symbolic further "produces an instability in the ego at the level of the imaginary."⁸⁷ This instability brought by the failure of phantasmatic identification reminds us all of the incoherent nature of subject formation; this incoherence, as Butler believes, has the potential to democratize the field of minoritized subjects by opening up "the crossings of identifications" through which subject positions are composed.⁸⁸

"The crossings of identifications" does happen in Ouyang's experiences of female impersonation. In his memoir, Ouyang honestly records the patronization of different

⁸⁷ Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "sex"*. New York: Routledge, 1993, pp. 105-106

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 114-115.

theatre fans, among whom are many famous courtesans. It was not uncommon for the two professions to have crossover interactions. Many New Theatre actors frequented brothels after performances and many prostitutes became frequent visitors of theatres. Actually, according to Ouyang, one of the famous actresses in a New Theatre troop becomes a prostitute herself later. What intrigues me in Ouyang's account of this aspect of his acting career is his ambivalent tone. His account of the interactions between the actors and prostitutes dances around a tone of sympathetic identification and one of moral denigration. Written 15 years after The New Theatre period, his memoir, as a final conclusion of his lifetime achievement in theatre aesthetics, doubtlessly adopts an evolutionary ideology in describing his progress along this career path. As a major mover in the institutionalization and canonization of modern Chinese theatre, he must have internalized the perceived standard of theatre aesthetics of the May Fourth elite and retroactively viewed this phenomenon as profane and decadent. He repeatedly stresses that The Spring Willow Theatre is different from other new theatre troops in its firm belief in the doctrines of true art, which suggests that the professionalization of theatre must be dissociated from commercial profits and its cross-over with the prostituting profession, albeit an impossible task. In spite of his denigrating tone, Ouyang, nevertheless, reveals his sympathy towards those fans. In one case, an unidentified "old gentleman" sends him letters of admiration on a regular basis without any intention to meet up with him in person. Ouyang is deeply touched by the feelings expressed in his letters, which strongly state a shared sympathy between "the two souls of the demimonde."

Ouyang, based upon the phrasing and wording of the letters, assumes this “old gentleman” must be a woman. Obviously touched but disturbed by these letters, Ouyang concludes this incident with a series of self-interrogations. First, he questions the basis of the shared sentiments in these letters: what constitutes a demimonde? Does his life choice as an actor naturally include him in this demimonde? Second, he doubts the secret admirer’s moral concern about not seeing each other. The “old gentleman” explicitly states that his decision not to see him is an attempt to stay within the boundary of decency, an effort to safeguard feelings within the proper realm of morality. Surprisingly, Ouyang seems to question such a choice of moralistic restraints, a slight dissenting voice that does not cohere with his overwhelming moral condemnation of the actors’ liaisons with the prostitutes.⁸⁹

The ambivalent tone in the description of this incident will eventually reveal itself to be an inner struggle of Ouyang when he comes to a detailed account of his “friendship” with two fans who are prostitutes. Before Ouyang goes into a description of this relationship, he engages in an in-depth analysis of the possible reasons why prostitutes like to hang out with actors. He says,

They are business dealers. Their clients treat them like goods, using them as objects for money exchange. Their interactions with the clients are merely out of professional conventions; they are not spontaneous with their genuine feelings. To have some boy friends outside of their profession makes them feel like real human beings. Their befriending with the actors is a transgressive act in the eyes of the

⁸⁹ Ouyang, *Zi wo yan xi yi lai*, 54–55.

pimps. For those clients, this is unbearable. But from their perspectives, this is not a big issue. There are a number of possible psychological motivations behind this.⁹⁰

Although Ouyang feels uncomfortable with the New Theatre's association with prostitution, he, as the above quote shows, actually has strong empathy towards his prostitute fans. This, I argue, is a result of his empathetic approach to enacting the female roles. Because of his attempts to genuinely understand the psychological motivations behind the roles, he develops the capability to emphatically connect with the prostitutes from real life. Nevertheless, it is important to note that Ouyang does not claim a position of the knower who subsumes these prostitutes under his gaze. Ouyang's wavering feelings towards his morally minoritized prostitute friends is indeed a result of the failure of phantasmatic identification, an identificatory crossing that leads to the temporary dismantling of his own sense of self. His critical attitude towards the socially sanctioned views of morality, if made possible by his acting experience, attest to his crossings of identifications enabled by his ongoing trials and errors in acting out the roles—a process that leads him to realize the constitutive incoherence in subject positions. Through the practice of theatre, he comes to realize the theatrics of life.

His grappling with the performativity of femininity leads him to a state of “ontological queasiness,” as identified by Nicolas Ridout. Ridout identifies this existential dimension along with the rise of modern realistic theatre, a socio-aesthetic space that provides the actors a framed “face-to-face” encounter with the other. While

⁹⁰ Ibid., p. 79.

this “face-to-face” encounter provides an ethical space for modern subjects to enjoy reciprocity, Ridout turns his attention to moments of failure in this face-to-face communication, which, according to him, comes with affect when the undoing of communicative codes brings “an apprehension of our own position in relation to the economic and political conditions of our theatre-going.”⁹¹ Ridout’s concept of theatrical alterity resonates with Butler’s idea of gender performativity. If Butler strenuously cautions us against the misappropriation of performativity as voluntary performance, Ridout’s theory is a meaningful engagement in suggesting that theatre is a fruitful site for a Butlerian concept of performativity to emerge not because of its nature of performance, but because the ontological queasiness in this space does make it easier for the imaginary to emerge for ethical reiterations of the phantasmatic signifiers. Ouyang’s mixed feelings towards his prostitute fans, in light of Butler’s and Ridout’s theories, can be regarded as a result of the ontological queasiness caused by his theatrical face-to-face encounter with them. We can see his attempts to truly understand them as a process of crossings of identification, which eventually leads to an ethical encounter with radical alterity facilitated by his coming to awareness of the constitutive instability of the self.

This process is testified to in his detailed account of his socialization with them. In one passage, he tells us how these “real” women, when mingling with them backstage, simply merge with the “masqueraded” women, creating a destabilizing moment when the alignment between sex and gender is contested.

⁹¹ Ridout, *Stage fright, animals, and other theatrical problems*, 33–34.

According to tradition, women are not allowed to go to the backstage. This is indeed a superstition. Even now in some backward areas, people still follow this rule. When we were performing in The Laugh Stage, many female fans come to visit us in the backstage with fruit, desserts, flowers and toys. The *dan* actors usually wear wigs of long hair. When the fans come, they merge with the masqueraded women. It is very difficult to tell the real ones from the fake ones when they sit along side with us. We talk and laugh with any constraints. These are really fun times. They enjoy exchanging their handkerchiefs with us, jokingly tell us to “become sisters with them”.⁹²

To quote this passage, I do not intend to point out a moment of potential lesbian eroticism here; rather, I would like to suggest how this moment is queer in the sense that it opens up a space of crossings of identifications where the normative categories of woman are pried open, which further unsettles the alignment between gendered subjects and compulsory heterosexuality. This moment of quasi-homosexuality does not solidify a coherent homosexual subject as an abjected subject position under the law of heteronormativity; it is a crossing of identification that renders the law of desire and identification under the heteronormative demand defunct. We might look at Ouyang and the prostitutes’ fun time together as a democratic connection that makes the encounter with radical alterity possible.

This encounter facilitates a critical reception of the mandated codes of human intelligibility, or, the signifiers of power that define our living worlds. In the case of Ouyang, it is his understanding of the normative meaning of femininity, especially the

⁹² Ouyang, *Zi wo yan xi yi lai*, 80.

forms of femininity that are marked as morally degenerate. In his crossing onto the feminine subject positions that are relegated to the exteriority of the realm of social respectability, he becomes critical towards the defining power of dominant discourses of gender assignments. In an anecdote, he explicitly records how a prostitute fan hits on him. In this moment of escalating desire and affective exchange, he becomes morally apprehensive. Nevertheless, this moment of ontological queasiness does not lead Ouyang to morally condemn the “indecent” of his female suitor; on the contrary, this agitation forces him to a corner of existential crisis, in which he starts to interrogate his capability to know the other.

Ms. S leans again the bed, inviting me to move closer to her. She reaches out to me, holding my hands. With her eyes squinted, she stretches herself. The light goes through the crimson silk curtain and shines on her face, creating an effect of shimmering light. Soon, her body also starts to tremble. Her showing of femininity is quite adequate. But from my standard of stage performance, the air she created is not thick enough. She questions me, “I like to be playful with others. It is so much fun for a woman to be playful with a man! You always play as a woman. Aren’t you supposed to know the heart of a woman?”⁹³

Facing the interrogation of Ms. S, Ouyang does not resort to the pride of male dominance. If, as feminist theatre scholar Sue-Ellen Case suggests, male masquerading of femininity in ancient Greece serves the purpose of excluding women from the realm of knowledge

⁹³ Ouyang, *Zi Wo Yan Xi Yi Lai*, p. 89.

and productivity through monopolizing access to signifiers of gender,⁹⁴ this moment of affective exchange between Ms. S and Ouyang does not reinforce Ouyang's sense of entitlement to the legibility of feminine codes; rather, this moment brings the "real" woman to encounter with the "ideal" woman, further problematizing the real meaning of woman. Ouyang critically interrogates himself, "At that time, I was indoctrinated with Ibsenism. Her interrogation somehow makes me insensitive. She said I don't understand woman. But do I really know what a woman is?"⁹⁵

Ouyang's acknowledgment of his inability to know the feminine other entails larger political implications than its sheer methodological difference from traditional *dan* acting. As Eve Sedgwick tells us, the epistemological dichotomy between knowledge/ignorance is exactly how modern sexual knowledge exercises its power of subjection and subjectivization.⁹⁶ In appropriating the feminine other, Ouyang does not arrive at an affirmation of knowledge about this sexual other; rather, he comes to embrace his ignorance about the ontological state of the feminine other. His acknowledgement of ignorance distinguishes him from a conventional male masquerading of the feminine other, usually an objectified appropriation for the mastery of the male self. Ouyang commits his lifetime to understand what a woman really is; his dedication only leads him to a constant suspicion towards any absolute conclusion about it. Ouyang's impersonation continues to enable different social imaginaries of femininity that are informed by dominant codes and at the same time exceed them.

⁹⁴ Sue-Ellen Case, *Feminism and theatre* (New York: Methuen, 1988).

⁹⁵ Ouyang, *Zi Wo Yan Xi Yi Lai*, p. 89.

⁹⁶ Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the closet*.

If the sentimentalization of femininity in the culture of early modernity is followed by the hystericization of the modern female subject in the scientific discourse of the late 19th and early 20th century, this continuous patriarchal attempt to understand its feminine other, as Foucault-inspired feminists have revealed, is nothing but a fictional institutional control of woman.⁹⁷ From the family dramas in the 1910s to the Ibsen-inspired Nora plays in the 1920s and into 1930s, we also witness a similar cultural trajectory in the making of modern Chinese theatre. With the image of the fallen woman and “the New Woman” as its central concern, “the feminine question” in modern Chinese theatre, similar to its Western counterpart, is also picked up as the driving force in its changing contours. My previous analysis has demonstrated that the construction of fallen femininity in early Chinese family drama is to serve the purpose of rejuvenating a nationalistic patriarch. The advent of Ibsenism seems to deviate from such a patriarchal purpose. Nevertheless, as my later analysis will reveal, this seemingly liberatory discourse of gender actually helps to solidify a new form of patriarchy--a new regime of liberal heteronormative sexuality.

As the aforementioned passage about Ouyang’s “face-to-face” encounter with his prostitute indicates, Ouyang is also indoctrinated with the male ideology of Ibsenism; nevertheless, as his acknowledgment of ignorance about the other suggests, his creation of the Noras image, informed by his earlier experience with impersonation, will take on

⁹⁷ See Gail Finney, *Women in modern drama: Freud, feminism, and European theater at the turn of the century* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989). Elin Diamond, *Unmaking mimesis: essays on feminism and theater* (London; New York: Routledge, 1997).

drastically different forms from other May Fourth male elites.

The Noras of China

Scholars now widely hold the view that the introduction of Ibsenism in the May Fourth Era is the primal event in the ascendancy of realist aesthetics in China. Tian Ben Xiang, a pioneer in the field of modern Chinese theatre studies, upholds the introduction of Ibsenism in China as the advent of “modern consciousness” and the major event that indicates the “value formation and maturation process” in Chinese modern theatre.⁹⁸ Chou Anhwa details the historical process of how Ibsenism was introduced to China through intellectual journals and translations; he concludes that:

The rise of May Fourth Movements brought a new way of thinking to the Chinese intellectual and artistic communities. Many progressive literatures in Euro-America and Latin America were translated and introduced. This condition endangers the collective craze for “Ibsenism”. At that time, the tenets of Democracy and Science had started to take roots in people’s mind; the awakened young intellectuals, in their needs to struggles, were very eager to borrow thinking weapons and spiritual motivators from the West. That time period witnessed the sudden outburst of discussions about individual liberation, women’s independence, and free love. Some journals also strongly advocated for natural science and materialistic views. This wave of change gave feudalistic superstitions and old morality a serious blow.⁹⁹

⁹⁸ Tian, *Zhongguo xian dai bi jiao xi ju shi*, 138–139.

⁹⁹ Anhwa Zhou, *20 shi ji Zhongguo wen ti ju yan jiu* (Beijing: Zhongguo xi ju chu ban she : Xin hua shu dian zong dian Beijing fa xing suo jing xiao, 2000), 72.

Chou's rhetoric is a familiar one. Many scholars situate their discussions about the rise of Ibsenism in the larger change of cultural and intellectual landscapes. They all identify the desire for modernization as the primary contributing factor to this sea change, pointing out that the "social problems" dealt with in Ibsen's plays are timely cultural resources for the May Fourth intellectuals to appropriate for the purpose of addressing their liberalist agenda in China. Among the major political issues they want to address, women's liberation is prioritized as the key problem in the collective society's passage into modernity. Tsou Yu regards this surge of May Fourth feminism as a bidding farewell to Confucian patriarchy, an iconoclastic movement against the Confucian family-state kinship system. Tsou keenly observes that this wave of feminism, nonetheless, is basically dominated by male intellectuals; that is, the feminist agenda here primarily serves the purpose of implementing a new normative sexual regime of compulsory bourgeois heterosexuality. He further analyzes the female characters that are created in the rebellious images of Ibsen's Nora, concluding that "there is a systematic interest to place the masculine women at the center of theatrical representation, but also as figures of ultra-masculinity to be erotically desired under heterosexual pretences."¹⁰⁰ Tsou deploys Segwick's observation of the inherent epistemological incoherence in the modern hetero/homo divide and Judith Halberstam's concept of "female masculinity" to reveal that the heterosexual formation of Chinese modernity and nationalism is an unstable process. The challenge to this regime does not lie in the heterosexual regime *per se*.

¹⁰⁰ Yü Tsou, "After patriarchy": masculinity and representation in modern chinese drama 1919-45, 2000, 34.

Rather, the challenge lies in the inherent constitutive antagonism between individual sovereignty and social equality underscoring this liberalist framework of heterosexual nationalism. He explicates:

In the nation building context of Republican Chinese literature, the expressions of heterosexuality, as is often coded in the anti-patriarchal term *hunyin ziyou*, or freedom to marry, is usually balanced with an equally popular the term *nanu pingdeng*, or the equality between men and women....whereas *hunyin ziyou* facilitates the necessity and intensification of heterosexual desire to serve the ideology that mystifies the nation state as a spontaneous and organic unity, *nannu pingdeng* indeed articulates a moment of profound discontent with nationalism's own compulsory heterosexuality. To the extent that the doctrine of equality mobilizes a process to eliminate differences between men and women, it confronts the discourse of heterosexuality, which is fundamentally consisted in the elaboration and intensification of such differences, we may now start to treat this principle as one of the most interesting and consequential legacies produced by the Republican Chinese discourses on feminism and modernity.¹⁰¹

Tsou, via Halberstam's conception of "female masculinity", argues that the Nora images created by the May Fourth male elite are "transgendered" females that are masculinized images. This transgenderism, in his view, problematizes the logic of desire and identification in compulsory heterosexism, unsettling this regulatory regime by releasing a potential homoerotic desire between the putatively heterosexual couple. He further claims that "the love affair between the heterosexual man and the Noraesque butch" indicates the incoherence of heterosexuality, which is at the same time "the most original

¹⁰¹ Ibid., pp. 33-34.

and illuminative manifestation of the urgencies and crises that inform the Chinese discourse on modernity.”¹⁰² This inherent contradiction is shared with Western liberalism,¹⁰³ a social contradiction, according to Cael Keegan, which is usually culturally resolved by the public sentiments of popular melodramatic forms.¹⁰⁴

In light of the above analysis, I would like to suggest that, in the Chinese context, if the concepts of progress and freedom define the collective mentality towards modernity, then the inherent contradiction of heterosexuality that Tsou identifies in the Nora plays can also be considered as an inherent contradiction between the idealistic demand of individual sovereignty and the urgency of collective national sovereignty. While the need to modernize propels the male elite to deploy the images of butch Nora as a rallying point to raise the political consciousness of the collective for the purposes of subverting the old Confucian patriarchy, an implicit heterosexual compulsoriness is implemented in order to contain the sovereign awareness of those newly liberated individuals for the emerging nationalist patriarchy to take hold. The cultural symptom of this contradiction can be seen in the wave of discussions about the consequences of Nora’s running away from the household, where male elites show their concerns about a woman’s social positioning once she decides to leave the domestic sphere. The famous founding father of modern Chinese literature, Lu Xun, cogently prescribes two solutions—coming home or falling

¹⁰² Ibid., p. 35.

¹⁰³ This inherent incoherence, not exceptional to the Chinese context, can be traced to the fundamental premise of discourses of modern liberalism—that is, the contradiction between freedom and equality as Chantal Mouffe succinctly coins as “the paradox of democracy.”

¹⁰⁴ She tells us, “melodrama is a compensatory aesthetic system arising in historical conjunction with liberal democracy. Through which the inegalitarian contradictions of this politics are affectively vented and subjunctively resolved.” See Cael Keegan, *Queer Melodramatics: The Feeling Body and the American Democratic Imagination*, 2010, p.9.

into decadence.¹⁰⁵ That is to say, given the political economy of gender, a woman can either financially depend on the husband as a wife in the domestic sphere or become a sexual commodity for exchange in the male-dominated public sphere. Even though Lu Xun's tone is filled with sympathy and understanding, what lurks behind his spot-on analysis of the political economy of a gendered division of labor is a benevolent father's caution and warning. To situate these discussions back in the dramatic renditions of the butch Noras, we won't be surprised to see that the Noras in the plays are created to challenge the old patriarchy, only to affirm the emerging legitimacy of liberal patriarchy. For example, the quintessential Chinese Nora, Tian Yamei, created by Hu Shih in *The Greatest Event in Life*, only becomes politically aware of her freedom to choose her own marriage partner under the pedagogy of Mr. Chen. After Yamei takes up her courage to run away from her parents' control, the play arranges for her to embrace Mr. Chen's company.¹⁰⁶ Another Nora play, *The Night the Tiger is Caught*, by Tian Han, also features a similar Nora character, Liangu, who only dares to assert her will against her father's demand after her beloved lover is beaten down.¹⁰⁷ Guo Morou's historical play *Zhou Wenjun* appropriates the eponymous historical female character to stage a modern woman's rebellion against social expectations. In the play, Wenjun articulates a typical Nora assertion of individualism: "I was a daughter and a wife for others before. But now I

¹⁰⁵ See Chien, Ying-ying, "Feminism and China's 'Nora': Ibsen, Hu Shi & Lu Xun." *The Comparatist: Journal of the Southern Comparative Literature Association*, 19 (May 1995), pp. 97-113.

¹⁰⁶ See Hu Shih, "The Greatest Event in Life," in Edward M Gunn, *Twentieth-century Chinese drama: an anthology* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1983).

¹⁰⁷ Han Tian, Jian Dong and An Tu, *Tian Han dai biao zuo* (Beijing: Zhongguo xi ju chu ban she, 1998).

want to be treated like another human being by you.”¹⁰⁸ Those manifesto-like lines abound in many of the Nora plays, making clear the liberal ideology of individual freedom and genderless equalitarian society. These butch Noras, despite their assertiveness against their parents, will run to the dominion of their male lovers without hesitation. Wenjun’s determination to become an independent person can only be realized with her lover, Sima Xiangru’s, rescue.

The male elite’s rendering of the Nora plays, as my discussion above suggests, all resort to a form of sentimentalism that tries to resolve this inherent contradiction and solidifies the emerging regime of heterosexual nationalism. The Noras, though seeming to possess the qualities of an independent woman, are only granted with personhood when their independence is accompanied by a relationship with a male counterpart. This relationship, sanctified as a testimony to free love, becomes the throne of individual will and freedom, securing the sovereignty of the Noras. The invisible puppeteers behind these schemes of Nora rebellions, either disguised as a romantic free spirit or a down-trodden rebel, embody the will powers of the male elites. To do justice to the Noras, we should point out that the Noras, far from being assertive self-sufficient agents, are tokens of exchange for the male elites to bargain with the old patriarchy. In light of Gayle Rubin’s analysis, these dramas of Nora rebellion are no less than “traffic in women” between the old and the new patriarchy. The Noras might seem to run away from the old sex/gender system defined by the Confucian kinship structure. Their “freedom”,

¹⁰⁸ Moruo Guo, *San ge pan ni de nü xing* (Shanghai: Guang hua shu ju, 1926).

nevertheless, is only possible when they enter the new gendered relationship of production and reproduction assigned by the liberal patriarchy. The Noras run from one “home” to another, in a pattern where “women are in no position to realize the benefits of their own circulation.”¹⁰⁹

Against the larger cultural and historical backgrounds of the rise of Nora plays, I now proceed to examine Ouyang’s Nora images. To begin with, I will show that the Noras portrayed in Ouyang’s plays, contrary to those by other male elites, are not masculinized to stabilize an emerging liberal heterosexual bond. They are not deployed to resolve the inherent contradiction identified by Zou; rather, they embrace this contradiction and produce a space of queer desire.

Queering Nora

Among Ouyang’s plays, those often categorized by scholars as Nora plays are created in the 1920s after Ibsenism has a full-fledged influence on the cultural scene. They include *The Shrew* (1922), *After Returning Home* (1922), and *Behind the Screens* (1929). *The Shrew* tells of the vicissitudes of a newlywed couple’s marital life. Taking pride in their nuptial bond as a testament to their free love, Chen and Yu, nonetheless, will soon be forced to reconsider how sacred a free love-based marriage can be. At the beginning of the play, the Chen family gathers together to discuss the strategy about how

¹⁰⁹ See Gayle Rubin, “The Traffic in Women,” in *Deviations: a Gayle Rubin reader* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011), 45.

to reveal to Yu an unbearable truth—Chen is going to take in a concubine. The family discussion comes to a stop when Yu comes home from outside. When Yu first comes back, Ouyang stages a temporary moment of happily-ever-after to showcase the ideal picture of modern marriage-cum-family life.

Chen: That's for sure, our marriage is not arranged by our parents. I don't think one can find a more joyful marriage like this in the world. When we first encountered each other in the art exhibition, a few conversations already made us realize our *xingqing* (personalities, natural dispositions, or innermost feelings) match perfectly. Though we went through a lot of obstacles, we eventually tied the nuptial bond and realized the ultimate passion of our love. Marriage does not abate the love between us. Even now, after our son was born, we still love each other like before. Everyday when I am out there working, I always want to come home to be reunited with you. When I see you at home, I feel like in a honey moon. Our love is a process of accumulation; therefore, it is different from others'. (Yu seems to think about something. Chen takes over the baby.) This is the testimony to our love....oh...the souvenir of love...my baby.

Yu: (takes over the baby) It is doubtless that our love is mutual. Since I got engaged with you, I have already given my body and soul to you.

Chen: I also did the same thing!¹¹⁰(Translation Mine)

This dialogue is a perfect rendition of the underlying belief in modern liberal monogamous marriage, albeit overtly ostentatious. I left the word *xingqing* here in its original Chinese in order to showcase how individualism plays a key part in this

¹¹⁰ Yuqian Ouyang, *Ouyang Yuqian ju zuo xuan*. (Beijing: Ren min wen xue chu ban she : Xin hua shu dian fa xing, 1956), 10–11.

conception of modern love-based monogamous marriage. The Chinese word *xingqing* used here is worth noting because it connotes meanings of individual uniqueness that is alien to a Confucian understanding of the social. Haiyan Lee has shown us that *qing*, during the era of May Fourth enlightenment, was reconceptualized to indicate the innermost feelings of someone as the authentic basis of one's being, a sentimentally defined notion of modern individuality. This newly minted idea of authentic self is further reinforced by the introductions of modern romance, a literary articulation of free love that helps the May Fourth elite to seek the ultimate affirmation of individual freedom and sovereignty. The combination of *xing* and *qing* in this context, therefore, needs to be further examined. If *qing* refers to feelings, emotions or sentiments, *xing* (meaning nature or disposition) is used here to reinforce how these genuine feelings are the foundation of one's authentic being. Furthermore, the implicit connotation of sexuality is later suggested by the baby as the testament to their true love, a tangible object that stands as the crystallization of the ultimate realization of their conjoined individuality. The perfection indicated here refers to the ultimate realization of one's individually unique being in the process of conjugal reciprocity. This dialogue, rather than one that helps to move the plot, sounds like propaganda affirming the legitimacy of their love-based marriage. In my view, this conscious appropriation of the characters to propagate certain ideology is a legacy of early New Theatre, in which playwrights or directors intentionally turn the stage into a public forum to disseminate new ideas about social organization, political movements and moral thinking. In addition to making

explicit the ideals of the new marriage, this dialogue, I argue, serves another important function that holds the key for us to understand Ouyang's difference from the other elites.

As the plot unfolds, the Chen family eventually manages to reveal the truth, hoping Yu will accept this decision and co-exist with the new concubine. What makes the play different is Yu's reaction. Instead of getting jealous or feeling betrayed by Chen, Yu refuses to accept this new arrangement out of disillusionment with the ideals behind this marriage of free love. With a fist of anger, she demands Chen to give the concubine money after tearing off the conjugal contract. In exchange of the son, Yu manages to divorce Chen. What's even more shocking is that Yu decides to take the concubine away with her, offering her education and a proper life. The ending, through a series of escalated confrontations between Yu and the Chen family, distinguishes her from other Noras in the sense that she, rather than entering the dominion of the new patriarch, attempts to establish an independent world of female bonding. Additionally, the ending departs from a sentimental resolution that is usually supplemented in Nora plays where we see the Noras run towards the embrace of their young lovers. Yu's decision to break away from "this deceiving patriarch" is not a sentimental resolution but a heroic endeavor full of self-righteousness. She staunchly asserts to take the concubine away, even announcing a Utopian striving for a feminist community where women can support each other without being subjected to the law of the Father. Idealistic or not, this ending is unique among all the May Fourth Nora plays in its absolute renouncement of patriarchy, old or new. The rebellion of Yu, unlike most Noras, is not against the old Confucian

patriarch under the tutelage of her putatively equal male counterpart. Yu's confrontation is directed towards her liberal male counterpart. In so doing, Ouyang sees what other male May Fourth elites cannot see—the inherent gender inequality in the liberalist idea of free love marriage.

We will continue to encounter this kind of self-sufficient Nora in Ouyang's *After Returning Home*. In this story about a U.S. educated male elite's homecoming journey, we are presented with a drama of a love triangle among Zhiping and his two wives, Zhifeng and Mary. Similar to *The Shrew*, the dramatic conflict in this play starts with the sudden return of a long absent family member. In this case, Zhiping comes home from his study in the U.S. with a secret that he has married another woman there. The dramatic action of the play centers around Zhiping's attempts to reveal to his family and Chinese wife his new marriage and intention to divorce. Zhiping's plan is to convince his Chinese wife that a woman should pursue her own will and desire rather than following her family's arrangement when it comes to marriage. However, in this process of persuasion, Zhiping gradually finds out that his country wife, far from being an unenlightened country maid, is a woman of independent thinking, regardless of her lack of exposure to modern thoughts. After learning about Zhiping's intention to divorce, Zhifeng, instead of being overwhelmed by jealousy and resentment, understandingly agrees with his decision, calmly stating that she does not need his company to achieve a well-balanced, self-sufficient life. This play ends with Zhiping's, rather than Zhifeng's, leaving home,

turning the domestic space into a patriarchy-free space of female agency.¹¹¹

Behind the Screens is the third Nora play that Ouyang penned. As opposed to the previous two that feature head-on confrontations between the assertive heroine and the hypocritical modern male elite, this play stages its protest against the new patriarchy through a discovery of a secret. It begins with a mahjong game where the members of “Association of Moral Sustainment” are expecting Yiqing and Mingyu, an actress and her daughter, to join them for fun. After they arrive at the mahjong table, the male members of the association started a series of repartees with the two. With sexual innuendos and political parodies, the series of repartees, while sounding frivolous and light-hearted, are indeed double entendres. For example, while the members start to flirt with the actress, a playful conversation goes awry and becomes a joke on revolution.

All: Beautiful! Beautiful!

Wu: This is incredible! The game can take on so many variations.

Zhao: In the future, when the red candles are lit, the couple can make more variations on bed.

Yiqing: When the red candles are lit, no variations can happen! (sipping wine)

Zhao: Women always pull tricks when they are on bed.

Yiqing: Thousands of years of profanity are all in you now!

Chou: Well said!

Kang Wugo: This sentence makes you sound like a revolutionary.

Yiqing: Under the flag of the Republic, if one can't utter a revolutionary slogan, how can one survive? But I want some real revolution!

Zhao: Me too!

¹¹¹ Ibid., p.40.

Yiqing: You?

Zhao: I want to start a revolution against women. As soon as the women come, our mahjong game is ruined. It even further disturbs my sleep.

Wu: Yiqing, what kind of revolution do you want? Do you want to put on a military garment?

Yiqing: I will stop here.

Mingyu: Mom, cut it off! The more you speak, the easier they make fun of you!¹¹²

The comic tone here, in my view, is employed by Ouyang to engage in a critique of the cultural politics of the New Theatre. As my previous discussion shows, the New Theatre is embraced by the reformist elite only because of its potential to spread revolutionary thoughts. It is not uncommon in much of early New Theatre that actors deliver an entire speech on new political or social issues. Here, Ouyang is not only making fun of the elites' biased stress on the propagandist function of theatre; he is further taunting the male elite's self-righteousness in promoting women's liberation. Ouyang stages a homosocial world of "moral sustaining", only to reveal its hypocritical nature. As my previous discussion shows, women in May Fourth male feminism's discourse do not possess autonomy and individualistic will; they are objects for exchange between the old and the new patriarchy. In this play, Ouyang lays bare the logic of exchange behind the complicity between the old and new patriarchy. The homosocial world of new ethics is expecting a replacement of the old leader by the new one; not surprisingly, they are father and son. The story culminates in the moment when people start to share their ill-fated

¹¹² Ibid., pp. 30-31.

love stories. It is during this heart-to-heart moment that the actress reveals her heart-broken romance with a self-proclaimed progressive young man, who abandons her and her daughter for a richer wife. From the details of the story, the members of the association start to realize that this cruel young man is the leader of their association, whose new leader will be the son by the actress! As the old leader is about to return from outside, the moral crisis of this homosocial world is about to break out and the façade of this hypocritical world of the male elite's new ethics will crumble. In order to prevent the façade from falling apart, the members urge the actress and her daughter to hide behind the screens as the leader enters the house. Unfortunately, the self-righteous leader allows no secrecy hidden under his roof, resulting in his fatalistic encounter with his own dark secret. Noticing that there are people hiding behind the screen, he demands his members to remove the screens. While reluctantly removing the screens, a member mumbles with a cautionary tone, "five thousand years of morality all depends on the screens."¹¹³ This seeming aphorism sums up the irony of the entire play, exposing how the new ethics of modern individualism promoted by the male elites is nothing but a mirage. This play tragically ends with the son's suicide after he finds out this unbearable truth, leaving the moral scaffolding built by the new patriarchy tumbled and shattered.

The three Noras created by Ouyang, when compared to other Noras, are closer to Ibsen's Nora in their processes of coming to political consciousness. They do not come to embrace their individuality under the guidance of their liberalist male counterparts. On the contrary, they come to embrace their individualism only when they see through the

¹¹³ Ibid., p. 40.

liberalist patriarchy's false promise. Their rebellions do not lead to dependence on their male counterparts; rather, their coming to self-awareness is a radical breakaway from the new patriarchy. They all refuse to enter the heteronormative regime of modern liberal marriage for pursuits of alternative forms of familial intimacies. The Noras created by Ouyang do not face a dilemma of coming home or falling into decadence. They are financially independent new women who manage to survive on their own. Without dependency on their putatively liberal-minded husbands, they struggle to build their alternative homes with themselves, their daughters or new sisters. They are heroines who practice a queer politics of new ethics, transforming the lexicons of domesticity, belonging, and intimacy.

It might be futile to prove to what extent the Nora images created by Ouyang are related to his cross-dressing experience. We might, however, take his efforts in cross-dressing as a process of self-fashioning as well as one of *becoming the other*. Teresa de Lauretis tells us that "Woman" is the collective category indexing the codified femininity made possible by the dominant technologies of gender in society, while "woman" refers to the actually existing females whose life experiences constantly collide with the "Woman" they encounter in all forms of representations.¹¹⁴ Ouyang's desire to understand what a woman really is does not enable him to truly understand a "woman" for the lack of such an essentialized subject position. Nevertheless, his doubt-driven desire to *become* the other unhinges the normative alignments between "woman" and

¹¹⁴ Teresa De Lauretis, *Technologies of gender: essays on theory, film, and fiction* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987), 1-30.

“Woman,” opening up the textuality of cultural values of desire that are associated with “Woman.” This power to unsettle normative textual formations of “Woman” is where queer desire comes in. The Noras with a queer impulse to create new familial forms and kinship structures are Ouyang’s imaginary interventions to the heteronormative lexicon of intimacy prescribed by other May Fourth male elites.

The Ascendancy of Nationalistic and Revolutionary Sentiments

In the 1930s and 1940s, despite the way in which the ideas of “New Woman” have exceeded the realms of intellectual debates and cultural representations to everyday life practices, the regulations of gender and sexuality, with the intensifications of wars and political turmoil, start to tighten up, appropriated by heteronormative nationalism, leftist ideology and modern eugenic thoughts. The introduction of Freudian psychoanalysis and Western medical discourse further consolidates the formation of a modern heteronormative sexual regime, demanding gender or sexual practices that are out of sync with this normative script to be swept under the carpet. It is under this change of sexual landscape that the traditional practice of cross-dressing starts to be regarded as unnatural and thus prevented.¹¹⁵ New Theatre, which prides itself on its force of disseminating modern ideas, will have to purge the evil practice of cross-dressing from the “feudalistic”

¹¹⁵ For a detailed historical analysis of how traditional *dan* acting is gradually regarded as degeneracy under the influence of nationalism and eugenics, please see Kang Wenqing, “Actors and Patrons,” in Wenqing Kang, *Obsession: male same-sex relations in China, 1900-1950* (Hong Kong; London: Hong Kong University Press ; Eurospan [distributor], 2009), 115–144.

past out of its purview, demanding a completion of the normative alignment between sex and gender on its realistic stage. Katherine Huiling Chou has detailed this historical process of the reification of heteronormative acting practices on the realistic stage in China. She tells us that this normative demand to make visible “the real women” on stage, on the one hand, helps women actors to emerge in the public space; on the other, this reinforcement of the alignments between biological sex and social gender dismantles the ambiguous space of gender cross-over in traditional cross-dressing, making gender-bending even more difficult.¹¹⁶ In this process, as Chou accounts, the most significant event is Hong Sheng’s juxtaposition of two plays. In the annual performance of Shanghai Association of Theatre in 1923, the U.S.-educated theatre scholar Hong Sheng purposefully arranges Hu Shih’s *The Greatest Event in Life* to be performed along with Ouyang’s *The Shrew*. While he uses “real” actresses in the first play, he makes actors cross-dress as the female roles on purpose in *The Shrew*. As Hong Sheng tells us in person, through this great contrast, “the audience will feel natural when they see real women acting as women, and feel funny when seeing men squealing to enact as women. The laugh from the audience officially ends cross-dressing on the association’s stage.”¹¹⁷ This anecdote does not simply tell us how cross-dressing is ruled out on the Chinese stage. Hong Sheng’s choices further inform us how this transition of theatrical aesthetics reflects the larger social change in which the heteronormative regime of

¹¹⁶ Zhou, *Biao yan Zhongguo*, 274–276.

¹¹⁷ Hong Sheng, “wo men da gu de shi qi guo le ma,” qtd in Zhou Huiling, *Biao Yan Zhongguo: Nü Ming Xing, Biao Yan Wen Hua, Shi Jue Zheng Zhi, 1910-1945*. Taipei Shi: Mai tian chu ban, 2004, pp. 275-276.

sexuality ascends in popular reception. The “unnaturalness” of cross-dressing highlighted through this juxtaposition does not stay at the level of acting. In his prescription, Hong Sheng seems to suggest that Tian Yamei is a natural woman who deserves to be aspired to by all the “real” New Woman in society, while the shrew in Ouyang’s play is everything but what a “real” woman should emulate. This normative demand of acting not only requests the correspondence between biological sex and social gender; it further rules out the space of queer desire and fortifies the liberal patriarchy’s marriage institution of marriage and gender role assignments.

This change of cultural landscape renders cross-dressing an intolerable fact on the stage of Chinese New Theatre. After this, Ouyang has to channel his unfailing dedication to cross-dressing into traditional *xiqu*, with which he creates many revisionist interpretations of historical female figures, including the quintessential promiscuous sinner, Pan Jinlian. Depicting her as a Salome-like passionate lover, Ouyang rectifies her image as a morally degenerate woman by portraying her as a heroine who relentlessly pursues her love for Wu Song even until the moment of her death. This play, first written in the form of *xiqu* and later rewritten into a spoken drama, might seem to be an anomaly among Ouyang’s plays in the 1930s and 1940s that mostly reflect patriotic or socialist sentiments. For all the “politically correct” plays that deal with issues of social oppression, Japanese threat, and national security, Ouyang’s *Pan Jinlian* epitomizes the romantic heroine who “merges Eros and Thanatos and who defiantly acts out her desire

under a falling blade.”¹¹⁸Ouyang grants autonomous voice to *Pan Jinlian*. His artistic endeavor can be considered a ventriloquist culmination of the liberalist patriarchy—the making of the feminine other as a token of ultimate true love, as Pan’s final hyperbolic suicidal gesture might suggest. Nevertheless, by paying close attention to how Ouyang dramatizes the inner passionate voice of Pan’s moral struggle, a disturbing affect is felt. By laying bare her innermost affective processes, Ouyang sanctifies Pan as a Goddess of true love, or the embodiment of the romantic principle that goes beyond any ethico-political concerns. This unreserved praise-singing to the personal pursuit of romantic love presents a disconcerting dissonance when the idealization of romantic love is gradually replaced by the pedagogy of political passions from the 1930s onwards.

Could we consider Ouyang’s embodiment of this passion-driven Pan Jinlian as the last gleam of queer affect in his career, before he gets interpreted into the nationalistic discourse and starts to codify Mulan-like or virtuous patriotic women?¹¹⁹ While revolutionary and nationalistic sentiments are on the rise and gradually dominate the social landscape, Ouyang’s *Pan Jinlian* remains a shimmering anomaly that carves out a queer space on the Chinese stage when the questions of national belonging and social class oppression dominate.

¹¹⁸ Lee Haiyan, *Revolution of the Heart*, p. 204.

¹¹⁹ As the Japanese invasion encroaches and the social antagonism escalates under the nationalist party’s ruling, Ouyang creates more and more plays to evoke nationalistic sentiments and raise socialist awareness. Even so, he is still fascinated with codifications of female roles; for example, the images of woman warriors and nationalistic courtesans are picked up by him to propagate his political ideology.

CHAPTER 2

MOURNING BEYOND MELANCHOLIA: TONZGHI AESTHETICS OF ALTERITY IN POST MARTIAL LAW TAIWAN

In the first chapter, through the focal point of Ouyang Yuqian, I delineated how the rise and metamorphosis of the family drama in Republican China are collective social efforts to undo crises in group identity. Facing continuous political turmoil since the late Qing, trauma-ridden intellectuals in China were prompted to seek new anchoring points in the midst of political sea changes. Family dramas were staged for the viewing public to reorient themselves in a world that was now rendered *unheimlich*.¹²⁰

By treating the first wave of family dramas in the 1910s and its later mutations in the Nora plays of the 1920s and 1930s as symptomatic of this collective anxiety, I have previously shown how a new emerging gender and sexual order is reflective of or inherent in this historical process of the formation of the Chinese modern nation state. The figure of the “New Woman,” along with her predecessors, and inheritors serve a pivotal function in this process of engendering the nation. Ouyang Yuqian, an active participant of this process in the theatrical scene, nevertheless creates images of women that go beyond the purposes of engendering the nation. My reading of Ouyang is an attempt to show how his practice of female impersonation enables him to produce queer affect out of these female images. Queer affect, in the sense of non-normative emotions,

¹²⁰ Here I am referring to the double meaning of this German term—something that is uncomfortably familiar. Using this term, I am also referring to the Freudian notion of “uncanny,” which will be related to my use of Freudian concepts of mourning and melancholia, as I will demonstrate later.

unsettles reified subject positions, calling for transformations of human intimacy and familial structures outside of the heteronormative demand by the nation state. This temporary emergence of queer affect, nevertheless, did not lead to the emergence of queer subjects. From the 1940s to the 1980s, we witnessed a series of political events that organized and mobilized the entire population into the regime of reproductive heterosexuality, through socialism, nationalism, developmentalism, or a synthesis of any of the three. Expressions of emotions and affect were strictly calculated to be channeled to the sublime object of various political figures—the socialist party, the Chinese nation state, or a developed future figured in different political images. Depictions of seemingly homoerotic relationships or same-sex romantic friendships were well crafted within the frames of comradeship or fraternity.¹²¹

Self-consciously queer aesthetics and politics start to emerge in the early moments of the post-Cold War era in the larger Sinophone¹²² world, first in Hong Kong and Taiwan, and then Mainland China. This historical emergence of queer politics is

¹²¹ For studies about how personal feelings are strictly yoked with social or even national feelings, we can look at how the meaning of home is rewritten during the socialist period in Mainland China. The socialist lexicon of familial intimacy is restructured into one, which replaces the Confucian kinship relationship with a party-state model. See Rosemary Roberts's studies of the remaking of "home" in the Chinese model theatres: Rosemary A Roberts, *Maoist model theatre: the semiotics of gender and sexuality in the Chinese Cultural Revolution (1966-1976)* (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2010).

¹²² A term lately coined by Shih-mei Shih and David Wang. Politically contested as it is, this term is primarily used to complicate the notion of "Chinese culture," delinking various "Chinese" cultures from its putative nation state. I use it to emphasize the geopolitical specificities among these sites of China, Taiwan, Hong Kong, and overseas Chinese communities, which are often subsumed under the supersign of "China," owing to their perceived cultural similarities. I have not resolved the historical questions concerning these sites. For example, can we also consider the Republican era a Sinophone site? To clarify the issue of coherence, I will not extend this term to my first chapter on Republican China for the time being. For discussions and contestations surrounding the Sinophone, see Shumei Shi, *Visuality and identity Sinophone articulations across the Pacific* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), <http://site.ebrary.com/id/10190623>. Jing Tsu and Dewei Wang, *Global Chinese literature: critical essays* (Leiden, The Netherlands; Boston: Brill, 2010).

coterminous with the changing geopolitics of the Sinophone world, a change that witnesses the reevaluations of various moments of political collectivism in these disparate geopolitical sites of the Sinophone world—in Taiwan, the reevaluation of KMT Chinese nationalism;¹²³ in Hong Kong, the postcolonial anxiety about “re-entering” China;¹²⁴ and in the mainland, the rewriting of socialist ideology and the reintroduction of cultural nationalism in the post-Socialist era.¹²⁵ What do these reevaluations have to do with the historical emergence of queer visibility in the Sinophone world? At the outset, queer visibility seems to be a consequence of the loosening of collective political control, when the tension and paranoia during the Cold War era subside.

However, it is important to be aware that this increasing visibility might be a consequence of the new formation of a global neoliberalist order. The intensification of transnational capital flow and the new global division of labor have made the states “open up” their doors to globally dominant cultural paradigms. We see the first wave of queer articulations emerge in the late 1980s in Taiwan, in a time period named the Post-Martial Law era for the democratization of this island. The first queer text, *East Palace West Palace*, shows up in the early 1990s in China, during a time period now named Post-Socialist for the neoliberalization of the mainland. One period is named for its political shift, while the other is for its economic change. In my view, the new historical

¹²³ For a detailed study of this historical process, see A-chin Hsiau, *Contemporary Taiwanese cultural nationalism* (London; New York: Routledge, 2000).

¹²⁴ See M. A Abbas, *Hong Kong: culture and the politics of disappearance* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997).

¹²⁵ See Christopher R Hughes, *Chinese nationalism in the global era* (London; New York: Routledge, 2006).

conditions across the Taiwan Strait, on both sides, should be examined and defined, along with their respectively changing domestic relationships with global financial and political forces—a politico-economic change, following David Harvey’s observation, that is described as neoliberalist.¹²⁶

Against this new global neoliberal condition of possibilities, queer politics and aesthetics emerge first and foremost as attempts to rewrite state-sanctioned family scripts. Home, a culturally-constructed space for local identity, is now rendered *unheimlich* by this new neoliberalist condition. This *unheimlich* condition ironically opens up a space for queer texts from both sides of the Taiwan Strait to complicate the domestic scripts of Kuomintang’s (KMT) nationalism and People’s Republic of China’s (PRC) socialism. Once again, it is when the normative meanings of “Chineseness” are undergoing another process of being remade or unmade, family dramas are staged to channel the disturbed affect and emotions of its subjects. While the Republican era’s queer affect has now been subsumed by the ideology of heterosexual reproduction in KMT’s nationalism and PRC’s socialism, the queering of the domestic script during the post-Cold War era has now been reified as articulations of politicized queer subject positions. The resurgence of queer affect this time around, thanks to the ascendancy of global queer emancipatory politics, produces Sinophone *tongzhi* (literally “comrade,” a term appropriated locally to indicate the LGBT community in the Sinophone world) or *ku’er* (a Mandarin transliteration of queer) subjects. Sinophone queer subjects are produced in the post-Cold War historical

¹²⁶ I follow David Harvey’s historical definition of neoliberalism. See David Harvey, *A brief history of neoliberalism* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2005).

condition, when the power dynamics between the global and the local have shifted radically. In making sense of the new power dynamics between the local and the global, these queer texts attempt to de-familiarize the familiar and re-familiarize the *unheimlich* for an articulation of queerness. In this chapter, I will focus on the post Martial Law era in Taiwan, for it is a geohistorical site identified by many scholars as the first locale where queer rights movements and aesthetics emerge in the Sinophone world.¹²⁷

Queer culture started to appear on a large scale in Taiwan from the late 1980s. This historical emergence of queer culture, along with its political movements, further leads to the emergence of queer subjects in Taiwanese society. Featuring unconventional subject matter and wild stylistic experiments, queer fictions in the 1990s do not reproduce the dark, voyeuristic depictions of homosexuality from previous years;¹²⁸ rather, they celebrate the diversity of sexual expressions and the indeterminacy of libidinal flow in tantalizing and giddy terms. Aside from this sudden outburst of new queer literature, an entire new generation of queer scholars came along to pick up an earlier text, *Crystal Boys*, in order to offer new interpretations. *Crystal Boys*, written by the canonized modernist writer Bai Xianyuan, is one of the earliest Chinese fictions that features male homosexuality as its theme. When it was first published in 1973, critics either shied away from the homosexual component or read it through a humanistic lens of sin and

¹²⁷ Tze-lan Sang's historical mapping of the rise of queer subject is representative of such a view. Tze-lan Deborah Sang, *The emerging lesbian: female same-sex desire in modern China* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003). For a detailed study of how queer subjects emerge in Taiwan, see Fran Martin, *Situating sexualities: queer representation in Taiwanese fiction, film and public culture* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2003).

¹²⁸ Prior to the rise of new queer fictions in the 1990s, most representations of homosexuality are depicted with dark and voyeuristic terms. See Hans Haung's study in Hans Tao-Ming Huang, *Queer politics and sexual modernity in Taiwan* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2011).

redemption. It was not until the mid 1990s, when a group of queer scholars foregrounded the homosexual subject for a collective re-interpretation, that *Crystal Boys* become the Ur-text for Chinese queer culture. Their appropriation, by way of the high theories of Foucault, Deleuze, Lacan, and Judith Butler, has been criticized, however, by some class-aware scholars as creating a new cultural hegemony. In this chapter, I will start with the historically changing reception of *Crystal Boys*, mapping out the trajectories of these different waves of critical engagements. If *tongzhi* politics and aesthetics are critical valences produced through transcultural practices, such as the queer scholars' deployment of Western theory to re-read an old local text, does this hybrid form of progressive culture necessarily suggest an embrace of the global at the expense of the local? To answer that question, I will engage with a contextualized analysis of how the problematic of the global versus the local gets figured into the changing fields of cultural production in Taiwan since the 1970s. Starting with the 1970s, I attempt to understand *Crystal Boys* as one of the many cultural texts to rewrite the official family kinship script, a social phenomenon reflecting Taiwan's emerging national identity. I will show how this emerging national identity crisis is symptomatic of the increasing social contradiction produced through Taiwan's rapid capitalist modernization since the 1960s. National identity is formed through an affective politics of melancholia and *ressentiment* in order to articulate a structure of oppression and exploitation under the authoritarian ruling of the KMT. This politics of national identity formation subsumes the materialist question of distributive justice, attempting to overcome social antagonism and negative emotions

through branding a nativized image of the “true” Taiwanese as the revolutionary agent for change.

If the kinship scripts in these various forms of family drama index the individual’s changing power dynamics within the national and the global, how is the kinship structure in *Crystal Boys* queer with regard to this power dynamic? Does queerness in *Crystal Boys* imply a radical form of self-making that cancels out the collective *en total*? Or does it still operate on a bourgeois logic of humanist sympathy that lends itself to the articulation of a queer subject made possible by neoliberalist assimilation? As part of the collective rewriting of official kinship scripts, I contend that queerness in *Crystal Boys* must be examined in light of its strategies to intervene in the affective pedagogy of KMT’s Confucian moral sentimentalism. If KMT’s sentimental education has been losing its power ever since the inception of the identity crisis in Taiwan, these new cultural narratives or expressions about what home is supposed to be are all attempts to rework this affective structure. They try to overcome either melancholia or *ressentiment* stemming from the failure of KMT’s affective pedagogy. In response to recent affective and ethical turns, I suggest that one should not read moments of sexual shame in the text as complicit with the regime’s governmentality; rather, it is exactly in those moments of shame, I contend, that the *tongzhi* politics of self-transformation is initiated, a politics going beyond queer performativity. The *tongzhi* politics of self-refashioning overturns the Confucian script of sentimental moralism, reframing the question of distributive justice with the question of radical alterity. It is in those moments of encountering “the face of

the other”¹²⁹ that shame is transformed, not into resentment, but rather empathy, an affect opening up the relational chain between the self and the other along the family-society-state spectrum. It is with this ethical responsibility to the other that *tongzhi* politics and aesthetics are defined.

Similarly, the theatrical scene around this time period goes through a process of aesthetic reformation in response to this national identity crisis. While the fictions experiment with their narratives of the official kinship script, the theatre takes the route of the avant-garde, through either a more Brechtian type of political provocation or a more Artaudian kind of sensational fiesta, in order to meddle with KMT’s Confucian moral sentimentalism. With *The Dead Body of Mao*, queer theatre emerged in Taiwan in 1988 with Critical Point Theatre’s debut performance, a mock Confucius worship ritual turned into a postmodern family melodrama. The remaining section of this chapter will be devoted to a discussion about how this rewriting of the kinship script is dealt with in queer theatres in Taiwan. I argue that, with corporeality as their primary concern, queer theatres in Taiwan present the *tongzhi* politics of alterity at the corporeal level.

Family Catastrophe and The Re-emergence of Family Drama

The KMT regime, the Chinese Nationalist Party who relocated to Taiwan in 1949 after its defeat by the Chinese Communist Party, had implemented Martial Law on the island since the 1950s. Regarding the threat of the Chinese communists as a time of

¹²⁹ Here I am drawing upon Levinas’s concept. I will have further explications later.

emergency, they resorted to authoritarian ruling on the island with a determination to wipe out possible communists from within any corner of Taiwan. This time period, officially named *Donyuankanlun* (Mobilization for the Suppression of Communist Rebellion), is fortified by the regime of surveillance and discipline of the KMT party-state. A series of political prosecutions ensued since its implementation, culminating in a time period called “the white terror.” With the purposes of stabilizing political control, the KMT regime embarks on large-scale economic modernization projects, with the Ten Major Construction Projects as the pinnacle moment of the late 1960s.

With economic development, social contradiction follows. Since the 1970s, dissident voices started to emerge and political controls started to loosen up, leading to the official establishment of the first oppositional party, the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) in 1986, and the lifting of the Martial Law in 1987.

Among these moments of political turmoil, KMT’s 1971 relinquishing of its representative legitimacy as China in the U.N. is a significant event. A series of diplomatic failures awaken people in Taiwan from the unification ideology of KMT, prompting debates on the gaps between the socio-political realities of Taiwan and the national ideology promulgated by the state. The publication of *University Journal* in 1971 started a nonofficial political forum for intellectuals to debate, followed by a booming of *tangwei* (meaning “outside of the party”) journals. In the literary field, young writers emerged to produce new narrative styles and to develop unconventional themes,

challenging the cultural hegemony of KMT's propagandist literature.

Since the 1970s in Taiwan, the decaying Father image appears again in the family script, allegorizing the state's waning power. 15 years before the lifting of the Martial Law, Wang Wenxing in 1973 published his first novel, *Jiabian (Family Catastrophe)*, in *Modern Literature Monthly*.¹³⁰ Telling the story of a son's taking over the family after the father's disappearance for unknown reasons, *Family Catastrophe* first appears as a literary controversy due to its theme as well as its provocative experimentation with the Chinese language. Its violation of the syntax rule of modern Chinese language suggests a strategy of de-familiarization, a stylistic choice that is in tandem with its theme—the de-familiarization of the Father's dominion. The publication of *Family Catastrophe* starts the collective “Oedipus Complex” towards the governing authority of the regime in Taiwan's cultural scene, a phenomenon that will later be intensified as Taiwan's social and political unsettlement becomes severe.

Family Catastrophe is one of the earliest exemplars of such a challenge. Narrated with the focalizing voice of the son Fan Ye, a name eponymous with the ancient Chinese historian Fan Ye (A.D. 398-445), *Family Catastrophe* makes a strong political statement by invoking such a figure. Born an illegitimate son, historian Fan Ye is an uncompromising free spirit who takes pride in his unwavering attitude as a nonbeliever in all kinds of political or religious authorities. His strong personality predictably leads him to a series of emperor-sanctioned political exiles, during one of which he starts to compile

¹³⁰ Founded by Bai Xianyuan and Wang Wengxin at the Department of Foreign Languages and Literatures at National Taiwan University, this literary journal is an important cultural establishment in Taiwan, heralding in modernism since the 1960s onwards.

various historical narratives into a collection, now known as *The Book of Later Han*. Lucky as he may seem, Fan, nevertheless, cannot escape from a death sentence decreed by the emperor. His untimely death leaves *The Book of Later Han* unfinished, which will be completed by later successors. Fan's tragic ending in life marks his similarity with the prototype of Chinese historians, Sima Qian.¹³¹ Both suffer from political persecutions owing to their outspoken and intransigent dispositions. However, one striking difference lies in these two historians' choices when facing execution by the emperor. Sima Qian chooses castration over execution so that he can complete his historical writing as a eunuch in the palace; Fan Ye is after all an unflinching rebellious soul who seeks self-realization in death. What purposes, then, lie behind this literary allusion to Fan Ye in *Family Catastrophe*? We may read the central theme of father-son power dynamics here as allegorical of Taiwan's political situation at that historical moment. When diplomatic failures and internal unrest constantly challenge the representative legitimacy of the KMT regime as "China" on the world stage, the sublime figure of "China," a constructed space for spiritual longing, has now lost its transcendental power. By picking the name of a rebellious historian for its protagonist, *Family Catastrophe* aims to take over the right to narrate history from the hands of the state. This political allegory once again takes the form of family drama, a cultural expression tied with the Chinese rendering of "nation state" as *guojia*, (literally meaning "state-family"). While historian Fan Ye's rebellion eventually ends with his tragic death, character Fan Ye here succeeds

¹³¹ Sima Qian is the first historically known Chinese historian, who was castrated by the emperor for his daring outspoken manner. However, it was his own choice of castration over execution, in order to survive to complete his historical writings.

in expelling the looming ghostly power of the Father, taking over the family completely. This “patricide” process entails an emotional ordeal. Starting with the sudden disappearance of the Father, Fan Ye embarks on a journey of searching for him, a process narrated with flashbacks as a testament to ongoing psychological trials and tribulations. This self-quest allows us to see how Fan Ye works through his love-hate relationship with the Father, typifying this story’s penchant towards a Lacanian theorization of a male subject’s teleological entry into the Symbolic order—the dialectics between the other and the Other via the phallic position of the Father. The story ends with the triumph of the son, a final moment of self-realization over the loss or death of the Father. If we were to look at this self-realization as one literary attempt to work through the collective “Oedipus Complex,” how do we read the political connotations of the final moment of triumph? Is Wang suggesting an affirmation of a new identity that is more locally produced? Or is Wang attempting a re-making of “Chinese” identity? If the name of the Father refers to the legitimacy of the KMT regime, what does this family drama tell us about the implicated tensions between the individual and the nation state? Before I come back to these questions, I will revisit a short history of the changing literary landscape, which can further help us unpack the identity questions raised above about *Family Catastrophe*.

If Wang’s typical Oedipal script flags a moment of political identity crisis, the unresolved tension between Taiwan and China, or the global and the local, will not erupt on a full scale until the national consciousness debate from 1983 onwards. Between 1983 and 1984, a series of landmark socio-political commentaries were published in various

underground journals, debating whether the people living in Taiwan should be incorporated into a larger Chinese national identity. Now termed the debate between the “Taiwan Complex and China Complex,” this political and cultural event is considered to be a continuation of the debate on *xiangtu* (literally meaning “homeland”) literature in the 1970s. The previous *xiangtu* debate is a landmark literary event that demarcates the Taiwan literary field into two opposing camps: the modernists and the nativists.

Since the 1950s, the KMT regime had adopted strict regulations against cultural expressions, limiting the forms of cultural production to ideological propaganda that advocates for “combating the communist and resisting the Russians,” obviously a byproduct of the global Cold War situation. In 1956, professor Hsia Tsi-an founded the *Literary Review*, the first serious literature journal to be uncompromised by political propaganda. Hsia nurtures a group of young writers out of his students majoring in Western literature at National Taiwan University. All second-generation mainlanders, they later started another journal called *Modern Literature*, introducing various strands of Western modernist aesthetics and promoting an eclecticism of creating modern “Chinese” writings out of a cultural fusion between East and West. Shying away from realistic depictions of social reality in contemporary Taiwan, this group of mainland writer is famous for their psychoanalytically informed experimental styles, ushering in the era of modernist aesthetics in Taiwan. Categorized as the modernists, this group of mainland writer, is often regarded in the later debates about national identity as an elitist and privileged coterie, who, though against the ideological control of the state, still embraces

the Sino-centric ideology sanctioned by the KMT. That is, even though their openness to Western aesthetics might lead them to depart from the Chinese literary tradition in style or theme, their excursions usually entail a return to “China.” Regardless, this return is usually a reinvention. They differ from the mouthpiece literature produced by the state, but cohere with what Sung-sheng Yvonne Chang calls the “sinocentric cultural ideology,”¹³² an ideology affirming KMT’s representative legitimacy as the Chinese nation state, given its inheritance of China’s putative 5000 years of cultural heritage.

As opposed to the modernists, the nativists, or *xiangtu* writers, hold on to literary social realism as their aesthetic credo. They did not emerge until the early 1970s, when Chen Ying-chen, Huang Chun-min and Wang Chen-ho made their literary debuts in journals such as *Literary Season*, *Literary Quarterly* and *Literary Bimonthly* with heart-wrenching stories depicting marginalized lives in farming and fishing villages or migrant workers in the newly urbanized cities. This group of writers is famous for their emphatically social and realistic portrayals of the hardship of farmers, workers, or women who are victims of KMT’s modernization project. Their aesthetic choices nevertheless are in tune with their political agenda, which aims to rescue the exploited from the hands of Japanese and American investment. They vehemently dismiss the false promise of equal prosperity by KMT’s modernization ideology; however, their calling for distributive justice is still voiced under the pretense of building a great literature for the

¹³² This term is coined by Sung-sheng Yvonne Chang, who has detailed studies of the historical transformation of the literary fields in Taiwan since the 1950s with regard to the emergence of national identity crisis. See Sung-sheng Yvonne Chang, “The Modernist Trend and Aesthetization of the ‘China Trope’ in Mainstream Literature,” in *Literary culture in Taiwan martial law to market law* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), p. 104. <http://site.ebrary.com/id/10183456>.

nation and the people.

Even safeguarded under the banner of “Chinese” nationalism, the nativists’ postcolonial provocation still unsettled the KMT and caused the regime’s mouthpiece writer Peng Ke to launch a series of attacks, readjusting the battle line to the communist front. Peng Ke cautions the nativist writers to realize that the imperialism they should counter is communist imperialism rather than Western capitalism. Another prominent poet/scholar backing the regime, Yu Guangzhong, takes the lead to publish another, even harsher, article. Titled “Here Comes the Wolf,” Yu’s article equates the nativist literature with “Literature for the Workers, Peasants and Soldiers,” a form of propagandist literature mandated by Chinese Communist ideology. In so doing, Yu attempts to wipe out the nativists through a literary “white terror.”¹³³

The *xiangtu* literary debate ends with the KMT regime’s uncompromising control in order to quiet it down. This debate, nevertheless, sets up the stage for the battle line between the pro-independence camp and the pro-unification camp. A-chin Hsiao studies how *xiangtu* literature, thanks to its “faithful” depictions of local lives, was picked up by the political dissidents in the 1980s and deployed for its articulation of Taiwanese consciousness. She writes:

In the *tang-wai* activists’ discourse on Taiwanese consciousness, *hsiang-t’u* literature was first lumped together with the opposition movement. Both were viewed as the natural outcome of a long-standing Taiwanese consciousness which, the activists believed, had been evident in all layers of Taiwan’s society as a result of the overall economic development that occurred in the 1970s.

¹³³ Hsiao, *Contemporary Taiwanese cultural nationalism*, 50–74.

Borrowing the Marxist notion of the relationship between infrastructure and superstructure, both the literary activity and the political movement of the times were regarded as the faithful reflection of political and economic conditions on the island.¹³⁴

Hsiao goes on to analyze a representative manifesto by Chen Shu-hung, who appropriates *xiangtu* literature to represent the lives of the Taiwanese people, who suffer the oppression and injustices caused by the authoritarian regime and their ruling bourgeois. Hsiao cogently points out that, in this kind of discursive formation of Taiwanese consciousness, Taiwanese consciousness is seen as incompatible with Chinese consciousness. Moreover, the equation of Taiwanese consciousness with the oppressed evokes feelings of resentment and anger, an affective politics mobilizing the resentful local for a revolutionary usurpation of political sovereignty.¹³⁵

In light of the above analysis, *Family Catastrophe* cannot be read as a fiction encouraging local Taiwanese consciousness, given that Wang Wenxiang is a quintessential writer from the modernist camp. Nevertheless, if we read how this Oedipal script utilizes emotions to provoke the readers, we observe the same affective politics prevalent in the *xiangtu*-turned-local discourse—that is, facing the imminent collapse of the party-state system and its subsequent uncertainty, literary or cultural expressions

¹³⁴ Ibid., p. 91-92.

¹³⁵ Actually during the *xiangtu* debate in the 1970s, national consciousness was never an issue among the people who were involved. Partly due to the ideological constraints of the KMT, and partly due to their internalized patriotism, the *xiangtu* writers' strategy to call attention to the oppressed is through evoking Chinese nationalistic sentiments. With the trope of the compatriot, they demand the government to include those "Chinese" who are left out of the economic fruition of the modernization process. When the *xiangtu* camp is equated with Taiwanese consciousness from the 1980s onwards, Chen Ying Chen remains as an anomalous case. His identification with the voices from the oppressed leads him to form emotive bonds with the Chinese proletariat. Hence he adopts a staunch stance on Chinese nationalism as a way to counter capitalist imperialism.

around this time period mostly share a melancholic sense of loss and a resentful aspiration for change. For example, as we read in *Family Catastrophe*,

The boy was transfixed with fear, but at the same time he was trembling with hate. His father had never been stern or harsh with him. What's more, he had never laid a hand on him, not even during the times when his mama had hit him. Papa had always been the one to stand in her way and speak up on his behalf. How has he become such a bloodthirsty fiend all of a sudden?He could leave this household, he could run far, far, far away, and let them look for him. Let them regret beating him so hard that he had to cut loose and run. He wouldn't come home for anything. He would wander and drift from place to place, perhaps eventually he would settle down as a minor office worker in a faraway city. There was no telling what might happen. He might even get very sick. He would be lying somewhere in a little room all by himself with no one to look after him. And he wouldn't let them know, either. And he might even die, just like that. He would have nothing to do with them up to the day he died. His grief was now tinged with a sort of pleasure and satisfaction.¹³⁶

In this typical Oedipal primal scene of castration, the protagonist goes through a process of patriarchal subjection, resulting in a state of melancholic retreat from the ego, as Freud analyzes:

The distinguishing mental features of melancholia are a profoundly painful dejection, cessation of interest in the outside world, loss of the capacity to love, inhibition of all activity, and a lowering of the self-regarding feelings to a degree that finds utterance in self-reproaches and self-revilings, and culminates

¹³⁶ Wenxing Wang and Susan Wan Dolling, *Family catastrophe* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1995), 60–61.

in a delusional expectation of punishment.¹³⁷

Encountering the lost love object of his supposedly nurturing parents, Fan Ye undergoes an imaginary exile out of the patriarchal proper. His melancholic lingering on the irreversible loss of home further makes him identify with the feeling of loss itself, generating a death fantasy so potent that he takes pleasure in the denial of mourning. This feeling of melancholic masochism nevertheless yields to resentment towards the authority of Papa and therefore sets the tone for *Family Catastrophe*'s attempt to transcend the Name of the Father as a way to mourn over the primal loss, a structural melancholia, in Lacanian reinterpretation of Freud, that comes with one's entry into the Symbolic.

For *xiangtu* literature, melancholia is usually produced through empathetic depictions of the precarious lives of marginal people, such as workers, farmers, and prostitutes. In dramatizing their dehumanizing living conditions, *xiangtu* literature writers evoke a strong melancholia of the lost good old days. This nostalgic evocation further urges the readers to critically reflect upon the social realities devastated by capitalism.¹³⁸

In other words, across the modernist and the *xiangtu* camps, the trope of home becomes a site of what Wendy Brown calls "wounded attachment." The unheimlich home unseats the protagonists from their dominion, causing distress and despair over the loss of the familiar. This perceived loss further induces feelings of unjust deprivation, instigating

¹³⁷ Freud, S. (1917). "Mourning and Melancholia," in J Strachey, *Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Volume XIV (1914-1916) On the History of the Psycho-Analytic Movement, Papers on Metapsychology and Other Works*, 1957, 244, http://encompass.library.cornell.edu/cgi-bin/checkIP.cgi?access=gateway_standard&url=http://www.pep-web.org/document.php?id=se.014.0000a.

¹³⁸ See Sung-sheng Yvonne Chang's analysis of their aesthetics and ideology. Chang, *Literary culture in Taiwan martial law to market law*, 122-138.

resentful identification with the dispossessed. The affective politics identified in these cultural expressions is conveniently borrowed by later national identity politics for mobilization. In exploiting the sentimentality of the wound, this identity-based Manichean politics is first and foremost a politics of *ressentiment*, as Wendy Brown explicates,

In its emergence as a protest against marginalization or subordination, politicized identity thus becomes attached to its own exclusion both because it is premised on this exclusion for its existence as identity....But in so doing, it installs its pain over its unredeemed history in the very foundation of its political claim, in its demand for recognition as identity.¹³⁹

To further understand how this affective identity politics emerged around the site of the familial kinship script, I suggest that we should revisit the conundrum between the politics of distributive justice and the politics of recognition in Taiwan's historical context. If Taiwan's modernization project creates a social contradiction of uneven development, why does this contradiction take on the form of an identity-based politics for articulation? In literary and cultural expressions, how is this historical process in line with the popularity of family dramas?

Family Drama in the Era of Neoliberalist Individualism

¹³⁹ See Wendy Brown, "Wounded Attachments", *Political Theory* 21. 3 (1993): 409.

Cold War Taiwan witnesses Taiwan's standoff with socialist China and its closer assimilation into U.S.-led global, liberal capitalism. The way for Taiwan to participate in this new global division of labor is to create "special economic exporting zones," partially yielding national sovereignty to enable the free flow of translational capital. This "zoning technology," to use Aihwa Ong's term, depends on new governing technology, creating socio-political consequences of, in Ong's theorization, "graduated sovereignty." She explains:

This patterning of production and technological zones was designed to facilitate the operations of global capital; it thus entails de facto or practical adjustment and compromises in national sovereignty. The territorial concentration of political, economic, and social conditions mobilizes foreign investment, technology transfers, and international expertise to specific zones. I thus use the term graduated sovereignty to refer to the effects of a flexible management of sovereignty, as governments adjust political space to the dictates of global capital, giving corporations an indirect power over the political condition of citizens in zones that are differently articulated to global production and financial circuits.¹⁴⁰

At the outset, the national sovereignty of those "less developed" Asian countries, in Ong's formulation, seems to be at the mercy of transnational capital flow from previous colonizing countries. Nevertheless, as Ong stresses over and over, this partial yielding is

¹⁴⁰ Aihwa Ong, *Neoliberalism as exception: mutations in citizenship and sovereignty* (Durham [N.C.]: Duke University Press, 2006), 78.

a “well calculated” strategy of the authoritarian regimes, a politico-economic policy that leads to the consequence of “graduated citizenship.” She further explicates:

Asian tiger states, which combine authoritarian and economic liberal features, are not neoliberal formations, but their insertion into the global economy has entailed the adoption of neoliberal calculations for managing populations to suit corporate requirements. In postdevelopmental government, there is a mix of disciplinary, regulatory, and pastoral technologies aimed at instilling self-disciplines, productivity, and capacity to work with global firms. In production zones, low-skilled and migrant populations are governed through disciplining techniques (e.g., extreme controls on labor rights) and surveillance at the workplace. Such disciplinary techniques over low-wage workers and migrants are intended to instill both productivity and political stability, thus creating conditions profitable for global manufacturing. In practice, low-skilled workers enjoy fewer civil rights and less welfare protection than high-skilled workers in science parks and high-tech centers.¹⁴¹

Ong’s cogent description of the issue of politico-economic inequality within such a mode of production reveals to us the technology of citizenship in the East or Southeast Asian tiger economies. In the case of Taiwan, zoning technology started in 1966 with the special exporting zone in Kaohsiung, an economic zone attracting transnational capital with its condensation of massive cheap laborers, mostly female, swarming in from the rural areas of central and southern Taiwan. Before the establishment of the Hsinchu Science Park in the 1980s, the labor-intensive exportation-oriented mode of production accounted for the majority of the “GDP growth” in Taiwan, at a speed so rapid that it

¹⁴¹ Ibid., p.79.

made some economists call this phenomenon “the Taiwan economic miracle.” Nevertheless, as Ong’s analysis reminds us, the fruit and cost of this economic growth are not evenly distributed among the population. This zoning technology, along with the shift of national economic policy to a “technology intensive mode of production,” creates “uneven development” even within the island itself, allowing part of the population to enter global neoliberalist respectability at the expense of the laboring mass’s rights to mobility, welfare, and basic necessities. The making of the diligent, conformist laboring subject, as Ong points out, requires not simply disciplinary apparatuses but also pastoral soft power. In the case of Cold War Taiwan, I identify a mode of governmentality that neatly combines the two—I call this **“the Confucian sentimentalism of KMT’s nationalist governmentality.”** This governing mode utilizes corporeal disciplinary strategies—such as compulsory education, clinical control, militarization of social spaces, and the criminalization and pathologization of unproductive members of the population—that are identified by Michel Foucault in a modern nation state’s transformation into a bourgeois liberal state.¹⁴² In addition, it also relies on an affective regime of sentimental education at school as well as in realms of public cultural expressions, a kind of pastoral power to make the population into “docile bodies” for governmental management and control. The legitimate cultural source of this pastoral power is KMT’s reinvention of the great Confucian tradition—a newly invented ethico-political system based upon Confucian familialism. This reinvention dethrones the

¹⁴² Michel Foucault, *Discipline and punish: the birth of the prison* (New York: Vintage Books, 1995).

juan (君, a term traditionally indexing the rulers or governors who rule because of their innate virtues) from the cosmic-ethical order of Chinese dynastic politics, and replaces it with the sublime image of the ROC nation state, yoking this transcendental image disciplinarily or sentimentally in a perceived continuum from state, to society, to family and to the individual. All kinds of patriotic rituals—such as singing national anthems, celebrating official holidays marking the historical passage of this state, and memorizing/memorializing important historical names and events with history textbooks and monumental edifices—are implemented to produce the ideal citizen subject of the nation. The public sentiments generated through these rituals also take on private forms, registering the fictional stories and family melodramas that are sanctioned by the state in books, newspapers, and on stages and screens. All this governmental sentimental education is implemented to channel public sentiments into the right course, making sure that there is no affective flow out of the developing state’s ultimate goal—the maximization of productivity.¹⁴³

¹⁴³ For an analysis of how new Confucianists reconstruct an ethico-political Confucian system to legitimize the developing ideology during Cold War Taiwan, see Cai Yingwen, “The Divergences of Taiwan’s Democratic Concepts,” in *Contemporary Political Thoughts*. In this article, he details how neo-Confuciansim emerged along with Taiwan’s “economic miracle” to articulate a theory of alternative modernity, which in the end unwittingly “becomes the basis of ruling legitimacy of the authoritarian KMT regime.” Yingwen Cai, *Dang dai zheng zhi si chao* (Taipei Shi: San min shu ju, 2009), 39. Jeffery Henderson terms this state-steered developing model in East Asia as “plan rational political economy,” by which he refers to a mode of economic industrialization under the strict scrutiny of the state. That is, the states on the one hand transform their population into massive labor forces, and on the other becomes the senior partners of all the capitalists. While Henderson considers this mode of political economy to help the East Asian states maintain “autonomy” from the control of first world markets and corporations, I find Aihwa Ong’s concept of “graduated sovereignty” more apt to describe the question of political autonomy in this mode of political economy—that is, the subjects that are closer to the states or state-sponsored corporations do enjoy autonomy similar to their counterparts of transnational capitalists, while the laboring majority is deprived of any kind of autonomy. See J. W. Henderson, *East Asian transformation: on the political economy of dynamism, governance and crisis* (Abingdon, Oxon; New York: Routledge, 2011), 39–59.

In light of the above historical analysis, it is clear to us now that the genre of the family drama emerged around this time period primarily as a protest against KMT's Confucian moral sentimentalism. If this KMT kinship script promises a harmoniously equal solidarity among all the individuals in Taiwan, the effect of graduated citizenship makes some individuals more "qualified" than others. The sentimental feeling of loss in these family scripts stems from the bankruptcy of KMT's Confucian moralism; this melancholic loss furthers the release of resentful feelings as a consequence of the social disparity between citizens.

If, as I've discussed above, the belated legitimization of *Crystal Boys* as a queer Ur-text is an attempt to render queer identity on a par with neoliberalist individuality by way of the resentful affect, then I hesitate to revisit this text through such a politics of recognition. Rather, I intend to reopen the unresolved tension between the resentful and the redemptive components in the text to yield to an ethical reading of *tongzhi* politics of alterity.

The Mourning of *Crystal Boys*

Similar to the family scripts that I have analyzed previously, *Crystal Boys* participates in the affective structure of melancholia and resentment. *Crystal Boys* is the English translation of *Niezhi* (literally meaning "evil sons," or "illegitimate children"), the first fiction with male homosexuality as its theme in the Sinophone world. The

English title is named after “the glass clique,” a derogatory term addressing the homosexual subcultural group of 1960s to 1980s Taiwan. The difference between the Chinese title and the English actually provides a good clue for us to understand the politics involved in this cultural translation. The Chinese title *Niezhi* is a term taken from a literary proverb in one of the Confucian classics—*Mencius*, a collection of the anecdotes and thoughts of the Confucian thinker, Mencius. Propagating Confucian moral and political thoughts, *Mencius* is later classified as one of the great “Four Books,” a set of canonical texts that are required readings for imperial exams throughout various dynasties. The original sentence runs like this: “exiled scholarly officials and illegitimate children are always filled with worries and fears; therefore, they succeed.” Bai’s book title obviously compares the homosexual kids in the fiction to the “illegitimate children” in *Mencius*, a term that not only indexes one’s erasure from the Confucian kinship structure but also connotes a political allegory of one’s exilic state. Adopting a culturally significant term as its book title, *Niezhi*, similar to *Family Catastrophe*, stages a rebellion against the nation state. Many critics and scholars have made obvious this allegorical dimension, reading the evil sons as agents for Bai to stand up to the official culture.¹⁴⁴ This allegorical reading, nevertheless, undergoes harsh criticism by the queer scholars who appropriate this text from the mid-1990s on, treating *Crystal Boys* as first and foremost a queer text. The politics of this historical critical appropriation raises an interesting question. Does this historically changing reception parallel the regional border

¹⁴⁴ See Fran Martin’s analysis of these political readings in *Situating Sexualities: Queer Representation in Taiwanese Fiction, Film and Public Culture*. Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2003.

crossing of this text in an earlier age? That is, for the *niezhi* in the text to finally become crystal boys, does it need another 10 years for global queer politics to come “home”? If the queer rereading eventually translates *Niezhi* into *Crystal Boys* in the Chinese context, how do we account for the *Nie* (evil; immoral) component that is so pivotal in the original text for the crystal boys’ final triumphant collective coming out? Before I engage in a close reading to propose my solution out of this potential dead end, it is necessary for me to present an overview of the debates between previous interpretations.

When first published in 1983 in a book form, *Crystal Boys* was received with mixed feelings. Most critics shy away from the overt homosexual theme, focusing their discussions on the father/son tensions, which lead to either a politicized reading of Bai’s China complex or a philosophical reading of the struggle between body and soul. Even if critics venture to talk about homosexuality in the text, they mostly pay lip service, assuming a humanitarian moral high ground to advocate for social sympathy.¹⁴⁵ Nevertheless, the three major issues touched upon during this wave of reception—that is, the redemptive theme regarding the struggle between body and soul; the national identity question concerning the bifurcated Taiwan and China consciousness; and the representation of father-son tension and its aesthetic-political implications—will not be discarded by later queer reinterpretations. Rather, they serve as the building blocks.

Crystal Boys starts with the paternally-imposed exile of A-qing, the narrator, from the family. After his shameful homosexual scandal with the custodian at school breaks

¹⁴⁵ For a detailed record of the changing receptions of *Crystal Boys*, please see Zeng Xiuping, *Gu Chen, Nie Zi, Taibei Ren: Bai Xianyong Tong Zhi Xiao Shou Lun*. Taipei: Erya Publisher, 2003, pp. 25-41.

out, A-qing was first expelled from high school and then chased out like a decrepit dog by the father. Now homeless, A-qing takes shelter in a new-found kingdom, the homosexual underground scene in Taipei's New Park. Under the protection and tutelage of older homosexuals, A-qing starts to work as a prostitute, making his own living. Through A-qing's eyes, a wide spectrum of other fatherless gay teenagers is also presented to us. Drifting around their clients, sugar daddies and substitute parental care takers, these kids are compared as a group of young birds as they migrate from one love life to another. Bai thus weaves tales of one's deepest longing for intimacy and belonging amidst destitution and impoverishment.

Hans Huang keenly observes how A-qing's quest of ultimate belonging is depicted as a process of both downfall and redemption in the story. Bringing our attention to how homosexual sex is depicted with moral guilt, Hans Huang unfolds the narrative scheme, revealing to us how this politics of sexual shame is related to the creation of base femininity—that is, to the deviant form of femininity figured by A-qing's mother in the fiction. Huang writes:

Her fatalism can and must be read as an abiding sense of gendered sexual shame with which a base woman like her must live or even die. To read A-qing's transformation as a tale of redemption, then, is to condone the violence that the narrative grain exerts in punishing 'fallen' women like A-qing's mother and in 'symbolically blaming the bad mother for the son's ill-fatedness.'¹⁴⁶

¹⁴⁶ Hans Tao-Ming Huang, "From Glass Clique to Tongzhi Nation: Crystal Boys, Identity Formation, and the Politics of Sexual Shame," *positions: east asia cultures critique* 18. 2 (2010): 381.

Indeed, the father-son conflict, the driving dramatic force that keeps the plot moving, must be considered along with the triangulation among father, mother, and son for a holistic picture. Similar to the Freudian Oedipal script, A-qing's melancholic encounter with the Father's law is accompanied by his disillusion with the Mother's ideality. As he reminisces about his parents from his earliest childhood memory, a bifurcated picture is evoked:

Whenever Father sat alone in the living room studying the novel's great and universal principle of power—unity follows long period of division; division follows long periods of unity—Mother would be outside on her haunches, all alone, bending over and washing the never-ending pile of dirty bedding and clothes that she took in to earn extra money.¹⁴⁷

In this passage of reminiscence, A-qing establishes the diverging lives of his parents—a decaying father who attempts to rebuild his grandeur before his son by repeatedly reminding him of his decorated history of military service; and a silent mother who suffers from the day-to-day toil of housework and eventually breaks away from his father's violent dominance, eloping with a younger trumpeter. Hans Huang reads the mother's deviation from the domestic sphere as a gradual downward spiral into the abyss of moral degeneracy, as the fiction arranges for the mother to end up prostituting herself, dying all alone on a disease-ridden death bed. Huang further elucidates that A-qing's

¹⁴⁷ Xianyong Bai and Howard Goldblatt, *Crystal boys: a novel* (San Francisco: Gay Sunshine Press, 1990), 50.

identification, as this Oedipal script in the text unfolds, is with the morally debased mother rather than the father. When A-qing cries over his fugitive life, his mother's "downfall" into the cesspool of sexual sin and abomination becomes a point of identification for him. This identification, for Huang, is an important clue for him to read how homosexuality and female prostitution are linked together in the text with the affect of shame—that is, by representing homosexuality and female prostitution as acts that should incur moral self-reprimanding, *Crystal Boys* reproduces "subjection and subjugation of male prostitutes within such a sage-king state culture."¹⁴⁸

What Huang refers to as sage-king state culture is Liu Jen-Peng and Ding Naifei's concept, by which they mean a postcolonial recuperative form of a national discourse of modernity. Beginning with the early Republican era, Chinese male intellectuals, in an effort to become modern, formulate discourses of gender equality or sexual modernity for the emerging national identity. Their project of modernity is a form of translated modernity, an intercultural practice fusing traditional Chinese ethics and Western liberal thoughts. This discourse of modernity, nevertheless, creates a new hegemony of homogenization, by which new marginal subject positions are created, but yet excluded from this national identity. Forms of femininity that do not fit in this newly formulated domain of ideal womanhood will be branded as morally compromised and therefore must be excluded. By situating this sage-king culture in the context of 1960s to 1980s Taiwan, Huang makes a strong case that the KMT regime's discourse of modernization and modernity continues such a logic of postcolonial modernity. Indeed, if we bring back

¹⁴⁸ Huang, p. 383.

Aihwa Ong's concept of "graduated citizenship," those who are equated with these forms of sexualities in *Crystal Boys*, that is, male or female prostitution and homosexuality, are precisely excluded as sexual citizens under the governmentality of KMT's Confucian moral sentimentalism. For them to become visible under such political circumstances, they can only emerge as abjected subjects who are assigned or relegated to being ashamed. In light of this context, the depictions of sexual shame do reproduce the governing effects of KMT's regime of sexual morality.

Nevertheless, to read this text as complicit with such a state power is to read the narrative arc as a teleological progress to moral redemption, a reading strategy adopted by Huang. His reading strategy is based upon the first generation's metaphysical interpretation of the text as a struggle between flesh and soul, a reading suggesting a humanist redemptive solution to sexual aberration at the end of the text. This strand of reading interestingly coincides with the political allegorical readings. If the father-son tension, for the moral redemptive readings, is the primal cause of the evil sons' sexual degeneracy, for the political allegorical readings, it is the driving force behind Bai Xainyuan's identity complex with the transcendental phallic symbol of China, as embodied by those fatherless evil boys. This separation between the sexual and the political is reunited in Huang's reading, which succinctly reveals to us how the two, more often than not, work together to engage in a sexual education for its readers, thus regulating sexual citizenship. Huang reminds queer readers to not easily embrace this text in celebratory terms as the Ur-text, because queer visibility, far from being queer, is

actually a technology of subjugation by KMT's sage-king culture.

In so doing, Huang is engaging in a dialogue with the 1990s queer reinterpretations, which deploy Lacanian psychoanalysis, queer theory and trauma theory¹⁴⁹ to overturn the textual politics of *Crystal Boys* for a reparative¹⁵⁰ reading, finding moments of excess or *jouissance* in the text to argue for a queer subversion of the patriarchal nation state and a queer remaking of "home." This strand of thought is further contested by Li-fen Chen, who vehemently points out that this queer reinterpretation forms a new hegemony of its own:

Queer politics in Taiwan is at its strongest on the strategic level, which gives an edgy dimension and a witty touch to ideological critique in cultural debates. But it would be difficult for this politics to claim agency on behalf of "the disfranchised" if it continues to operate with a highly hierarchical agenda. Currently its formation of an alternative cultural space is built on the imagination of a "postmodern" subjectivity that privileges the notions of drag, camp, and performance as the ultimate signifiers of queer visibility, and hence models of liberation. As gender is theorized as play and as shifting identities, otherness tends to be understood uncritically in terms of artifice, crossing, desire, pleasure, and cool at the expense of the invisible and the truly marginal who cannot fit in this picture.¹⁵¹

Chen's critique is a familiar one. It brings us back to the debate between radical feminists and deconstructive gender theorists. For the former, a reified realist female subject needs

¹⁴⁹ See "Special Issue on Pai Hsien-yung," *Chung Wai Literary Monthly*, vol. 30, No.2, July, 2001.

¹⁵⁰ Here I am using Eve Sedgwick's concept. See Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick and Adam Frank, *Touching feeling: affect, pedagogy, performativity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), 123–151.

¹⁵¹ L.-f Chen, "Queering Taiwan: In Search of Nationalism's Other", *Modern China Modern China* 37.4 (2011): 409.

to be identified as a stance to make political actions for “the disenfranchised” possible, whereas for the latter, politics lies in an ongoing disruption, reiteration, or resignification of the dominant gender codes. Chen seems to lean towards the former, but with a closer look at her rhetoric, we will find out that the figure of “the disenfranchised” is not a gendered or sexualized subject, but something that has been relegated to the margins of Taiwanese society for a long time.

To what possible marginalized group does her figure of the disenfranchised refer? Titled “Queering Taiwan: In Search of Nationalism’s Other,” Chen’s article is provocative by opposing the making of the queer subject in Taiwan to nationalism on this island. Situating the emergence of the queer subject against the larger background of national identity crisis, as I analyzed before, Chen revisits the queer reinterpretation of *Crystal Boys*, connecting it with the postmodern rhetoric of identity politics shared by both a pioneering subculture journal *Daoyu bianyuan* (“The Island’s Margins”) and the inter-Asia intellectual group. In so doing, Chen reveals to us an elitism in this postmodern stance, a privileged choice that is once again linked to the “Chinese cosmopolitanism” within the mainlander community. She explains:

Zhang’s attempt, in the final analysis, is to construct a Bai Xianrong, in terms of national/cultural identity, as neither Chinese nor Taiwanese, by being neither Lu Xun’s nor Lai He’s literary son. In other words, Bai is imagined here as a “neizi,” “a pseudo-Taiwanese” like those with mainlander origins who feel out of place in a

“Taiwanized” Taiwan and who are reluctant to be part of this change family/nation.¹⁵²

Here we can see how Chen points out that this wave of queer making also underscores a postmodernist rhetoric of national (dis)identification, a pitfall in her argument that excludes “the truly marginal” in this new, seemingly liberating queer subject. This putative liberating queer subject, she further explicates, is indeed a normative and oppressive privileged subject position, one that “hierarchize[s] the ‘developed’ and ‘underdeveloped’ homosexuals.”¹⁵³ What she means by “developed” is a queer subject position made possible by access to global cultural capital and mobility, a position that also resists the local binding of nationalized identity. Nevertheless, in her thinking of this tension between global cosmopolitanism and third world nationalism, she easily falls into a binaristic thinking. That is, she reproduces the nativist politics of resentment and anger, as I theorized before, to articulate the social contradiction emerging from the socio-political consequences of “graduated citizenship.”

In so doing, Chen seems to agree with Huang that there is nothing radically queer in *Crystal Boys*; this text, if anything, is first and foremost elitist, as well as complicit with state cultural ideology, a discourse embracing the global modern at the expense of the local. I contend, similar to the queer interpretations, that queerness in the text is exactly the site where we can break this binaristic divide between the global and the local, a

¹⁵² Ibid., pp. 400-401.

¹⁵³ Ibid., p.402.

transcultural site where the politics of resentment of the nativists can be transformed into a politics of radical alterity. To do so, let us return to the question of sexual shame.

Huang's observation of how sex is depicted as moments of moral shame in the text is very cogent and apt. However, I depart from Huang's redemptive reading in the sense that these instances of sexual shame, for me, are not subjectively felt states of emotions, but rather relational moments of affective unsettlement. In understanding how another negative feeling, that of "envy," works in textual politics, Sianne Ngai attempts to read it as more than an effect of subjugation. Borrowing Rom Harre's formulation, she succinctly explains:

The fact that we tend to perceive envy as designating a passive condition of the subject rather than the means by which the subject recognizes and responds to an objective relation suggests that the dominant cultural attitude toward this affect converts its fundamentally other-regarding orientation into an egocentric one, stripping it of its polemicism and rendering it merely a reflection of deficient and possibly histrionic selfhood. Moralized and uglified to such an extent that it becomes shameful to the subject who experiences it, envy also becomes stripped of its potential critical agency—as an ability to recognize, and antagonistically respond to, potentially real and institutionalized forms of inequality.¹⁵⁴

It is in the potential agency to respond to the institutionalized forms of inequality that I seek to re-open the question of sexual shame in the text. Rather than looking at these depictions as "reflections of deficient and histrionic selfhood," I intend to, following Eve

¹⁵⁴ Sianne Ngai, *Ugly feelings* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2004), 129.

Sedgwick, explore the potential of these moments of sexual shame as a moment of identity “to be constituted.”¹⁵⁵

Furthermore, in response to Chen’s critique of the queer scholars’ uncritical embrace of cosmopolitanism, I contend that the tension between the local and the global emerging in Taiwan’s national identity crisis is also dealt with in these moments of shame. The politics of resentment existing between the mainlanders and the local Taiwanese in the text operates at two levels. First, the social class divide between the substitute fathers and the fatherless evil boys; second, A-qing’s gendered script of the Oedipal complex.

Right after A-qing is exiled from his father’s dominion, we are led by his point of view to another “home,” a subaltern counterpublic that he himself names “the dark kingdom” of the homosexual world. He tells us:

there are no days in our kingdom, only nights. As soon as the sun comes up, our kingdom goes into hiding, for it is an unlawful nation; we have no government and no constitution, we are neither recognized nor respected by anyone, our citizenry is little more than rabble. Sometimes we have a leader—a person who’s been around for a while, someone who’s good-looking, impressive, popular. But we have no qualms about dethroning him any time we feel like it, because we are fickle, unruly people.¹⁵⁶

So much ink has been spilled over this opening paragraph, upon which generations of critics have endeavored to articulate the power dynamics between the national identity

¹⁵⁵ See Sedgwick and Frank, *Touching feeling*, 64.

¹⁵⁶ Bai and Goldblatt, *Crystal boys*, 17.

proper and this sexual counterpublic in the text. If the first generation critics have difficulty reading the two together, the queer scholars see an inherent link here, seeking subversive potentials in the dark kingdom. Zhang Xiaohong deploys Lacanian concepts to read A-qing's "evilness" as a flaming rejection of the Confucian mandate of xia (filial piety, and furthermore a declination to inherit the father's steed, for xia, in Chinese, also denotes the mandate to be "like" the father. She further reads his new-found kinship in the park with the "father-like" figures as a process of sexualization of the father-son power dynamic, a process where the phallic father is replaced by the anal father. Te-Xuan Yeh exposes the moments of governmental subjugation in the text to elucidate how the production of abject queer subjects is a result of state management of sexual citizenship. He further advocates for a reading practice going beyond traumatic dwelling. Their readings make the Foucaultian view of citizenship production obvious—that is, the formation of a proper form of citizenship always already implies normative sexuality. Therefore, Aihwa Ong's concept of graduated citizenship should also include the excluded sexual citizens. In light of this, one would not be surprised to see that the fatherless evil sons mostly come from the lower strata of society. Here, the question of the sexual and the disenfranchised are dealt with as one.

If the melancholic structure of feeling in Taiwan's national identity crisis indexes a collective identification with the loss of ideal nationhood, this structure of melancholic identification is also narrativized in *Crystal Boys* through a gendered Oedipal script. As Hans Huang has cogently pointed out, A-qing's identification with his "fallen" mother

provides the reader with a running thread throughout the text, a focal point that allows us to see A-qing's self-journey. For Huang, this identification overdetermines the exclusionary function of sexual shame; for me, this is a melancholic identification that registers a refusal toward phallogocentric identification.

Juliana Schiesari studies the implied gender politics in the Freudian formulation of mourning and melancholia, through which she lays bare how the site of loss in this Oedipal script is equated with maternal love. She further suggests that a "melancholic narcissistic relation to lack (the 'open wound')" is created as "a male strategy to assuage the fact of castration," as opposed to the female, who is associated with hysteria and depression.¹⁵⁷ Schiesari tells us that the modern humanist subject is first and foremost, as figured by the image of Prince Hamlet, a male melancholic subject who lays claim to a moral high ground through his melancholia, attempting to transcend the sublime horizon of the Father-God. To borrow her framework to read the identificatory mechanism in *Crystal Boys*, the exiled "evil" boys seem to occupy the princely subject positions of the melancholic male, a coping mechanism of wanting to redeem their downfall from the proper realm of the Confucian paternalistic kingdom. This gendered melancholic identification seems to be further attested to by A-qing's identification with the castrated mother, as A-qing displaces his longing for the lost mother figure onto his quest for the deceased younger brother, Diwa. This displacement, as Wei-cheng Chu has pointed out, can be read as Bai's conservatism in dealing with failed maternalistic identification, a

¹⁵⁷ Juliana Schiesari, *The gendering of melancholia: feminism, psychoanalysis, and the symbolics of loss in Renaissance literature* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1992), 61.

failure leading to the quest for substitute (anal) fathers or brothers.¹⁵⁸ Chu further suggests an alternative route to read A-qing's identification with the castrated mother, that is, as a mode of "queer desire" that will not yield to a recuperative allegorical reading of the return of the Father. By pointing out the fact that many of the fatherless evil boys are born of local Taiwanese mothers, Chu calls for a different reading strategy without further elaborating on its nuances.¹⁵⁹ I will pick up where Chu leaves off. In my opinion, the question concerning the maternalistic identification that is associated with the local "evil" sons should be considered with the changing power dynamics between A-qing and Wang Kuilong.

Among all the characters, Wang Kuilong stands out for having a similar family background to the author himself, despite the fact that he is not the narrator. Nicknamed "Dragon Prince," Wang is born the heir to a battle-winning glorious general who gives Wang the best education in both the East and West, as well as the best nurturing environment. No matter how privileged he is, Wang's homosexuality brings unspeakable shame to this respectable family, and Wang is eventually sent away by his father, a general, to the U.S. As his nickname implies, Wang stands out among the evil sons for his "princely" quality; he symbolizes the legitimate heir of the quintessential Confucian Father/Emperor, who deprives Wang of the legitimacy of inheriting his throne due to his shameful sexuality. Wang could be considered to be an image created by Bai himself to

¹⁵⁸ Chu Wei-cheng, "Father China; Mother (Queer) Taiwan? Bai Xianyuan's Tongzhi Family Romance and National Imagination," in "Special Issue on Pai Hsien-yung," *Chung Wai Literary Monthly*, vol. 30, No.2, July, 2001, p.114.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 118-121.

deal with his anxiety over his own sexuality. Bai, considered one of “the last aristocrats” from China, did not come to terms with his own sexuality until much later in life—not until early 2000, when the queer rights movement had significantly reduced the stigma attached to homosexuality.

The allegorical function of Prince Dragon is further confirmed by his tragic romance of unrequited love towards another allegorical figure in the text, Phoenix. The legendary romance between Phoenix and Dragon, a pair of star-crossed, same-sex lovers, becomes the running myth among the younger generations of homosexuals. Phoenix is a local Taiwanese orphan who was abandoned by his prostitute birth mother and grew up on the streets of Wanhua, an old commercial area that prospered during the Japanese colonial period and starts to decline at this time. He is portrayed as a wild and untamed free spirit, who has the uncontrollable urge to run away from any confinement of homes. His restlessness is further painted with a strong tinge of moral degeneracy due to his involvement in the sex trade, which has inflicted him with syphilis. The legend of Dragon and Phoenix reveals that they fall in love with each other at first sight, after they meet in the park. The well-to-do Dragon uses his family resources to rent an apartment as their temporary home, inviting Phoenix to cohabit with him. Their attempts to build a queer family, nevertheless, will not end happily-ever-after. Phoenix’s predisposition towards nomadic wandering leads him to break away from this well-equipped modern bourgeois home, seeking financial and emotional comfort from strangers in the park. The bewitched Dragon, not willing to let go of Phoenix, constantly drives around the city to bring him

back, only to encounter Phoenix's casual escorting with strangers. The climax of their legend is told in a melodramatic fashion, filled with intensified sentimentality. One night, while Dragon begs Phoenix to come home, Phoenix vehemently refuses his request. Dragon yells out, "if so, please give my heart back to me." The enraged Phoenix pounds his own chest, shouting, "it is here, take it". Out of desperation and rage, Dragon stabs Phoenix in the heart, killing him. The legend ends with Dragon holding the dying Phoenix amidst a puddle of blood, crying, shouting, and descending into insanity. News of the homicide breaks out and becomes a social scandal. The publicly humiliated general father of Dragon sends him away to the U.S. on a Japanese boat. Dragon starts his exiled life in the underworld of male homosexuals in New York City, seeking his own redemption from the racialized kids he encounters there as a reparative process to compensate for his desire to "lick clean the poison on Phoenix's body".¹⁶⁰ The tragic legend between Dragon and Phoenix, a story that circulates in the gay community in the Park, is told by the elders to the young as a founding myth of the emerging queer imagined community.

In A-qing's process of becoming queer, we might ask how this myth serves as an identificatory mechanism as a queer. As a son born to a mainlander father who also fought in the wars in China and a local subaltern Taiwanese woman, A-qing, nevertheless, refuses to return to the realm of the Father in his quest for a queer identity. His identification with the castrated mother leads him to reject Dragon's love, an act of affective resistance that turns male melancholia into female empathy, which replaces a

¹⁶⁰ Bai and Goldblatt, *Crystal boys*, 76–81.

reparative egoistic attachment with radical alterity. If the “Taiwaneseness” of Phoenix and other locally born kids provides an identificatory affinity for A-qing, this “local” affinity must be considered from their economically underprivileged subject positions; that is, what is local about them is not their ethnic markers, but their born state of homelessness—a state indicating their exclusions from the subsistence provided by the state-implemented, home-based model of modernization in the 1960s and 1970s. If this founding myth is the Oedipal script for the evil sons, it is with Phoenix that A-qing identifies. During their first sexual encounter, A-qing, instead of willingly accepting the reparative love from Dragon, forms an affective resistance towards Dragon.

After his exile in the U.S., Dragon returns to Taiwan, starting his journey of reparation. In his subsequent encounters with “local” Taiwanese kids, he aims to compensate for the loss of Phoenix by serving as a provider, emotionally and financially, to the underprivileged local boys. A-qing is one of them. Despite his underprivileged financial status, A-qing, rather than embracing Dragon’s nurturing, refuses to be sentimentally subjugated. Instead, he has his own task of emotional reparation, a lifetime search for a substitute of his deceased brother, Diwa. The parallel between the two quests for emotional reparation and dialectical power/emotive dynamics is clearly dramatized in Dragon and A-qing’s first encounter, when A-qing is providing a sexual service to Dragon in a run-down, sketchy hotel. The newly returned Dragon wishes to seek comfort and reparation from this surrogate “little brother,” A-qing. Different from “the kindness of strangers,” what Dragon is longing for is not dependency on the other, but rather a

consenting willingness to be taken care of by the other. As the story goes, we see Dragon start to open up to his casual encounter, pouring out his traumatic past like a patient making confessions to his therapist. In recounting his traumatic exile imposed by his father, Dragon starts to nostalgically reminiscence on his past days in Taipei, evoking a folk song depicting the idyllic agricultural scene of old Taipei with rice field and little egrets.¹⁶¹ Dragon's return to Taiwan is also a homecoming journey, with which he seeks to make peace with his exilic trauma. His nostalgic description of the changing landscape of Taipei demands the emotional support from A-qing to play the symbolic function of the little egret, which represents his irrevocable memory of the lost home and at the same time provides him with reparative affects. In calling his temporary sexual partner "my little brother," Dragon is evoking the Confucian ethical category of "brothers," hoping to find solace from this stranger by making him a "little brother" as compensation for his failed moral obligation to become a legitimate son, elder brother, and expected governor, as demanded by the Father.

If, in the Confucian moral system, the demarcation between the self and the other presupposes the interconnectedness of subjects, as opposed to views of liberalist acquisitive individualism, then it also delimits each subject's freedom and moral obligations within this politically hierarchized networks of ethical positions. That is, the cardinal category of the governor and the governed (emperor and subject 君臣) defines the power dynamics within each corresponding ethical category, such as Father/Son, Husband/Wife, Elder Brother/Younger Brother. Whoever is situated in the latter ethical

¹⁶¹ Ibid., p. 32-39.

position must be subordinated to the former, and conversely the former must pay moral obligations to the latter. In light of this, Dragon's reparation is to reassume his moral position as the elder brother, as a way in which he can amend his failure to succeed his father's socio-political position as a governor. That is, Dragon, in seeking reparation from A-qing, is the quintessential melancholic prince here.

What interests me, though, is A-qing's lukewarm reaction to Dragon. As the story unfolds, A-qing will eventually find out that his client is the legendary Dragon. Rather than feeling privileged to have a sexual encounter with or offer affective support to this legendary "father figure" of their community, A-qing has mixed feelings of sympathy, repulsion, and spite for this figure. How do we make sense of A-qing's changing reactions towards Dragon? How is his affective relationship with him suggestive of his own complex towards his deceased little brother? In their first encounter, after Dragon pours his heart out to A-qing, A-qing refuses to play the role of the little brother, wanting to escape from the emotional whirlwind of Dragon's unspeakable trauma. Lying about his subsequent appointments, A-qing finds an excuse to run away from the hotel. The following long passage describing A-qing's psychological state is worth quoting for its significance:

"We'll run into each other at the park sooner or later, Mr. Wang," I blurted out as I walked out of the door and ran down the creaky stairs bathed in darkness, out of the Yaotai Hotel, down the narrow, foul-smelling lane, and into the crowds at the Yuanhuan night market, surrounded by racks of dried squid, octopus, and greasy pig's heads. I stopped in the doorway of a café called the

Drunken Genie to stare at all the sesame-oil roasted ducks hanging by their feet from hooks and dripping oil. Suddenly I felt ravenously hungry. I picked out one of the biggest, plumpest ducks and asked the women who ran the café to give me half. I also ordered a bowl of steaming herbal soup. ...The bill came to a hundred and eighty-seven yuan. I reached into my shirt pocket and pulled out a wad of five hundred-yuan notes. No one had ever given me so much money before. He'd given me everything he had in his wallet, even apologizing, saying he'd only been back a short while and hadn't exchanged much money.¹⁶²

The ending of the passage can easily yield to a reading of inequitable exchange between Dragon and A-qing; that is, a social relationship mediated through inequitable access to capital and commodities. It further complicates our understanding of the question of the objectification of sexual labor through A-qing's affective responses. This kind of inequitable relationship abounds in the text, shared by all the park-based evil sons who have to rely on their mother-like pimps to hook them up with "sugar Daddies," all of whom have respectable houses and careers and provide them with both the means to live and the fantasies for better futures. These Daddy figures are either related to the ruling regime or entrepreneurs who profit from the state's trading policy, representing the benevolence of the governors. Through providing the evil sons with alternative shelters of home, they seem to replicate, rather than redefine, the normative meaning of *guojia* (the familial-state compound adopted by the KMT regime). If Dragon uses his wealth as exchange for A-qing's affective labor as "the little brother," A-qing's reluctance to be exploited for Dragon's reparative purposes is further dramatized in this long passage of

¹⁶² Ibid., p. 38-39.

detailed descriptions of affective, rather than emotional, changes within his body. That is, if emotion helps to articulate sentiment-based subjects, then affect, along this line of thought, refers to unspeakable moments when the boundaries between subjects are traversed in the collapsing of the totalizing power of a signifying system. In this affective state of subject shattering, the boundaries between self and other are opened up, and new ethical possibilities of relation are generated. In this passage, A-qing's unspeakable feelings towards Dragon are a result of his refusal to be sentimentally subjugated into the position of the little brother, which further leads him to confront his own desire for reparation in searching for the surrogate figures of Diwa. The prolonged descriptions of the night-market food and his process of devouring it produce ghastly feelings of insatiable hunger, revealing the empty core/constitutive antagonism within the mechanism of the subject. A-qing's ontological queasiness caused by "the face of the other," I argue, will lead to an ethics of "radical alterity," an ethical demand, as my later analysis will show, made possible by Bai's recoding of the brotherly love in Confucian moral sentimentalism.

As the case of KMT's appropriation of this Confucian ethico-political system shows, this system can be easily abused when those in power resort to its legitimacy for the benefits of subjugating the minor other, while turning blind eyes to the needs and demand of this other.

I read the stigmatized portrayals of prostitution and homosexuality in *Crystal Boys* as a dwelling on the wound caused by the abuse of power in the KMT's Confucian moral

system. Nevertheless, this dwelling, rather than perpetuating the negative images of those subject positions, facilitates a moral demand from the other, as embodied by A-qing and his identification with the castrated mother, which leads him to produce reflective ethical obligations towards “the younger brother.” This is a mode of ethico-political critique that I call “*tongzhi* ethics of radical alterity,” a possibility of radical alterity that deconstructs the self-mastery of all the ethical positions that belong to the position of governor in the Confucian moral system. Let me return to my discussion of A-qing’s identification process.

A-qing continues Phoenix’s predisposition for constant displacement and inconsistency. In my view, Phoenix is a trope for intransigence, one that is shared with all the evil sons here, whose implacability on the one hand signifies their refusal to provide their affective labor for the state and on the other vehemently demands an ethical justice from the powerful. If, as my discussions from earlier show, the state mobilizes Confucianism to produce infantilized subjects for productive purposes, the evil sons’ impulse for self-exile is a radical gesture against this sentimental education, demanding a reevaluation of the ethics of Confucian moral sentimentalism. The impossible love between Dragon and Phoenix must not be read as a tragic result of the hubris of the characters. Rather, it must be read as a trope of ethical demand, debunking the myth of romantic love that is always a disguised sentimental education by the state apparatus.

To situate the significance of the Dragon/Phoenix romance in the narrative structure, we will tease out a reading of how this ethical demand of radical alterity also rewrites the

normative script of Confucian familialism. The real identity of Dragon is not explicitly revealed in the story until much later after Dragon already has a sexual encounter with A-qing. Facilitated by the surrogate father and mother figures of Mr. Young and Wu, who take care of the run-away sons and make photo records of each of them, the story-telling moment is presented as one of affective pedagogy about the meanings of love, family, and the ultimate question of belonging. If affective pedagogy in a heteronormative domestic setting usually functions to implement the gender politics of bourgeois domesticity, this queering of familial affective pedagogy is to overturn the bourgeois ideological teaching, producing a seeming sense of fatalism that embraces the impossibility of love, familial intimacy and home-coming. As Mr. Gou finishes the story, he teaches A-qing the rules of survival, ending this cautionary tale with a moral of impossible belonging; he tells A-qing, “Go! A-qing! It’s time for you to fly. This impulse comes within your blood. You are wild babies born on this island. The uncontrollable impulses within you are like the earthquakes and typhoons of this island. You are a flock of young birds without nests. Like a group of sea birds crossing oceans and seas, you should keep flying ahead, flying towards somewhere you don’t even know where you will end up with.”¹⁶³

While this speech is often quoted as the motif of queer diaspora by scholars, I want to foreground my formulation of the *tongzhi* ethics of radical alterity in this seemingly cosmopolitan undertone. That is, if cosmopolitanism aspires to a global public where each individual can freely traverse boundaries and enjoy mobility, I want to argue that

¹⁶³ Bai and Goldblatt, *Crystal boys*, 88.

Crystal Boys does not celebrate such a seemingly cosmopolitan embrace of universal human equality. By highlighting the question of radical alterity, it seeks to address the question of how to relate to the other in a world where we encounter strangers constantly—that is, the ethical question in an increasingly cosmopolitan world made possible by transnational capital. A-qing refuses to be sheltered by the financial privilege of Dragon's global mobility. Rather, he keeps searching for all the little brothers that demand his care and nurture. From Diwa, to the mentally challenged Saxiaodi, to Lo Ping at the end of the story, the figure of the little brother haunts not only A-qing but all the *tongzhi* subjects in the process of becoming, demanding an ethics of care for the other. This trajectory is also a process of deviation, breaking, and finally revision of Confucian moral sentimentalism. If the deceased Diwa indexes a brotherly relationship that is determined by kinship, A-qing's emotional/libidinal investment will have to go from a brother by kin to a total stranger for the radical alterity to emerge.

The story ends on a New Year's Eve. When all the young birds flock to their surrogate parents' house for a New Year party, A-qing decides to break away from this substitute home, walking alone on the roads of Taipei only to encounter Lo Ping, a total stranger shivering all alone in a pavilion in the New Park. Inviting Lo Ping to come home with him, A Qing wraps this stranger in need with a scarf left by his friend and leads him out of the park. The story ends with the two of them running together on Chungxiao Road (literally the Road of Loyalty and Filiality) towards A-qing's home. While all the normative families, including the surrogate queer family, are enjoying their reunions at

home, this final moment rewrites the meanings of loyal and filial pieties in the Confucian kinship script. This uplifting ending gestures towards an ethics of radical alterity, demanding the constant redefinition of intimacy, family, belonging and—last, but not least--care for the other in an increasingly cosmopolitan world where global mobility and human sovereignty are equated with capital accumulation.

This *tongzhi* ethics of radical alterity can also be observed in queer theatre in Taiwan emerging in the era around the lifting of the Martial Law. While in *Crystal Boys* this mode of critical alterity must be discussed at the level of the narratological and identity-formation, in queer theatres, I will shift the ground of my discussion to that of the corporeal.

The Emergence of Unruly Bodies: Queer Theatre in Taiwan

Similar to the literary sphere, theatres in Taiwan, from the 1950s to the 1970s, were strictly regulated by state policy, delimited to the propagandist function of fighting the communists and modernizing Chinese culture. It was not until the late 1970s, when Yao Yi-wei took on the mission of Li Man-gei, did experimental theatres started to appear on Taiwan's cultural scene. Under the banner of "the experimental theatre festival," Yao mobilized theatre students to engage in a series of staging, acting, and playwriting explorations, culminating in the production of *Hojuxianpei* (*He Zhu's New Match*) in 1980.

Produced by Lang-Ling, the first amateur theatre reform group since the 1970s in Taiwan, *He Zhu's New Match* enjoys overwhelming success after its debut; its unexpected success brings theatre to the forefront of Taiwan's cultural scene, attracting public attention to the future possibility of this medium. As Chung Mingder comments, Lang-Ling and their groundbreaking piece are definitely of historical significance, for "they were carrying the future of modern Chinese/Taiwanese theatre on their shoulders."¹⁶⁴ Chung's historiography of Taiwan's experimental theatre movement since the lifting of the Martial Law is an important archive that details the social forces and aesthetic-political agenda of this generation's theatre reformers. He traces the inception of Taiwan's experimental theatre through the 1980s, arguing that Lang-Ling's legacy sets the stage for the little theatre movement to take full swing in the late 1980s. What interests me the most is the rhetoric in his conclusion about this historically significant piece. If this piece is the "birth mother" for the later little theatre movement, how do we account for his inclusive use of both Chinese and Taiwanese in the phrasing? Similar to the changing cultural politics in the literary sphere, the question of national identity in theatre will not fully emerge until the mid 1980s. As Chung's archival research indicates, the primary goals behind Lang-Ling's theatre reform do not touch upon the question of national identity of Taiwan. Led by a U.S. trained psychologist, Wu Jing-ji, who used to participate in La Mama in New York, Lang-Ling's reform mission, under Wu's central purposes of "touch yourself" and "open yourself to trust other people," foregrounds the

¹⁶⁴ Mingder Chung, "The little theatre movement of Taiwan (1980-89): in search of alternative aesthetics and politics," 1992, 64.

question of the authentic self and its relation to others with regard to the increasingly urbanized and industrialized living environment of Taiwan. Nevertheless, the universal question of what modern selfhood is supposed to be, as the specific aesthetic approaches of Lang-Ling suggest, becomes a question of how to be a modern “Chinese” in the particular context of 1980s Taiwan. With the cultural ideology of Sinocentrism not being seriously challenged, Lang-Ling expects its participants to appreciate the aesthetics of traditional Chinese opera, especially Beijing opera, in order to create a modernized form of traditional Chinese performance.¹⁶⁵ Instead of arguing if *He Zhu* succeeds in such a purpose, I am interested in the cultural politics behind *He Zhu*’s unprecedented success, especially when the audience’s preference of this piece over a more experimental piece is concerned.

Before *He Zhu*, Lang-Ling puts on a more avant-garde piece comprised of three formally different, but thematically connected, pieces. On June 30th and July 1st in 1979, they presented a performance of three pieces—*Departure*, *Baggage*, and *The Rooster and The Apartment*—to the audience in Taipei. Evolving from their training methods, which include improvisation, group therapist games, and coded bodily movements from Beijing opera, these three pieces start with *Departure*, where we see a group of actors engaging in warm-up exercises, ranging from making noises to practicing different facial expressions. After a series of group warm-up exercises, we see the actors exit the stage one by one, leaving only a man and woman alone on the stage. *Baggage* ensues. In a similar absurdist fashion to *Waiting For Godot*, the audience witnesses a series of interactions between the

¹⁶⁵ Ibid., pp. 22-67.

male and the female, punctuating the changing power dynamics between the two. We first see the two mirroring each other's gestures and behaviors, followed by the man's presenting of sculptures and furniture, through using the bodily simulation of other actors, to please the woman. As the romance between the two escalates, the woman suddenly becomes displeased with the man due to differing opinions about the shape of a particular sculpture. Out of uncontrollable rage, she destroys all the sculptures and furniture. In the ruins of their love life, they attempt to rebuild a harmonious world again, but to no avail. The last sequence of miming practice between the two allows us to see how the woman fails to reach the physical standard of the man, determining the incommensurability between the two. After her failure to match with the man's bodily comportments, the woman goes to the elevated area on the back stage, jumping off the edge to commit suicide. After *Baggage*, the audience was asked to move around so that a proscenium stage can be created for the last piece—*The Rooster and The Apartment*. This piece comes out of the collective improvisation of the ensemble; it tells the story of a mother visiting her son in Taipei from the countryside. The mother brings a rooster for the son to keep at the apartment; however, the crowing sound of the rooster disturbs the neighbors, and the mom and the son decide to cook the rooster to appease the angry neighbors.

As simple as it could be, this three-piece performance is an experimental piece touching upon the existential crisis in modern life. In the fashion of poor theatre or theatre of the absurd, the barren stage signifies the nothingness in life, accompanied by

the shifting animated and unanimated states of being as the actors step in and out of roles. The first piece sets the stage for the ontological drama of modern selfhood after all the actors exit, leaving a woman and a man, after the image of the Garden of Eden, on stage. The shifting power dynamics between this quintessential heteronormative unity, an abstracted form of the hackneyed melodramatic convention, signify the ongoing war between self and other in modern selfhood's struggle along the bifurcation between the masculine and the feminine. This highly abstract form of existential performance, nevertheless, needs to be brought down to earth, concluded with a family melodrama where the sacrifice of the rooster enables a narrative about modern people's alienated state of being in an atomized urban setting. As Chung Mingder tells us, the viewing public at that time in Taipei was not ready for the highly existential form of *Baggage*; the public favored the modernized form of family melodrama in *The Apartment* and *The Rooster* prepares Lang-Ling to launch its landmark production of *He Zhu*.¹⁶⁶

The unprecedented popularity of *He Zhu* marks the return of family drama on the theatrical scene in Taipei. Adapted from an old Beijing opera repertoire, *The Match of He Zhu*, *The New Match of He Zhu* reintroduces the socio-ethical function of Chinese moral sentimentalism in theatre, without providing a moralizing closure that is usually seen in a traditional piece in order to restore the tentatively transgressed moral and political order.¹⁶⁷ *The Match of He Zhu* is a formulaic comedy of errors commonly seen in

¹⁶⁶ Ibid., p41.

¹⁶⁷ I have deployed Haiping Yan's concept of "the sphere of feelings" to talk about how the ethical and the aesthetic work through each other in traditional Chinese opera, in which a Confucian moral principle is challenged but nonetheless restored at the end of the play. The ethico-political function of Confucian moral sentimentalism, as I elaborated in the first chapter, is the signature function of

traditional Chinese operatic repertoire. It tells the romance between Jing Feng, the daughter of a well-to-do family, and Zhao Xu, a poor aspiring Confucian scholar. The two have been betrothed to each other since childhood. But Feng's father, Liu Zhijie, starts to regret this betrothed marriage after Zhao's family wealth evaporates due to a family crisis. Jing Feng, nonetheless, abides by the Confucian virtue of female persistence, stealthily giving money to Zhao at night in the garden. After Liu finds out his daughter's violation of the ethical codes by meeting up with a man in private, he severely scolds Jing Feng, so much so that Jing Feng cannot bear this stigma, thus committing suicide by throwing herself into a pond. Liu's family is soon destroyed by a fire, leaving him and his devoted servant, Zhao Wan, to take shelter in a temple. One day, when Liu is starving, he asks Zhao Wan to beg for food on the streets. Zhao Wan comes back enthusiastically, announcing the great news that he has run into Zhao Xu, his former intended son-in-law, who has succeeded in the imperial exam and become a high official in the court. Hearing this news, Liu is first filled with hope, but soon realizes that he has caused his daughter's death. Zhao Wan tells him that Jing Feng's maid, He Zhu, in place of his daughter, has married Zhao Xu. Enraged by He Zhu's transgressive act, Zhao wants to reveal such an indecent deed, but nonetheless he swallows his pride, deciding to go along with this scheme to regain daily subsistence through his "daughter's" marriage. This comedy of errors, however, will eventually be exposed when Zhao Xu's parents

traditional Chinese opera. See Jen-Hao Hsu, "Queering Chineseness: The Queer Sphere of Feelings in Farewell My Concubine and Green Snake," *Asian Studies Review* 36.1 (2012): 1-17.

bring the real Jing Feng, who turns out to be alive and living with Zhao's impoverished parents, to meet the now prosperous Zhao. This final moment of recognition, nevertheless, will be sentimentally resolved when Zhao decides to marry both Jing Feng and He Zhu, a decision that not only reunites the family, but also restores the ethical order of kinship.

The ideology of this typical play allows us to see the social function of traditional Chinese opera. As my explanation of the Confucian ethical system suggests, the question of social distributive justice is always bound up with the questions of kinship or familial ethics. As the formulaic plot of this story shows, social inequality here is represented through Liu's violation of ethical codes—his refusal to abide by the marital vow he made earlier. This violation, though rectified by his daughter's unfailing virtues, will lead to the cosmic punishment that falls on him after he uses his patriarchal power to oppress his daughter. Nevertheless, this temporary moment of familial disorder will soon be restored when the new patriarch returns with a glorious triumph. His return not only lifts the families on both sides out of poverty, but also resolves the class divide between the servants and the masters by marrying both Jing Feng and He Zhu. The plot movement is driven by the social contradiction caused by the abuse of old patriarchal power. This contradiction will in the end be resolved with the new patriarch's restoring of the kinship system.

In the 1960s, a canonized modern Chinese writer, Lao She, rewrote the story in the modern form of spoken drama, attempting to create a modern drama from a national style. In his newly minted version, the cosmic ethical dimension in the operatic form is replaced

by a strong socialist ideology. Instead of allowing the supernatural to cause the tragedy of the star-crossed lovers, Lao She creates a wealthy but unkind capitalist as the intervening force that severs the marital bond between Jing Feng and Zhao Xu. In so doing, he converts Zhao Xu into an intransigent socialist hero who perseveres in the midst of destitution and oppression. Moreover, he discards the comedic resolution in the original play, making the two servants fall in love with each other and depart from the feudalistic world of lord and bondsman. The Confucian moral sentimentalism in the original play is transformed into a socialist politics of resistance and revolution.¹⁶⁸

In picking this age-old repertoire, Lang-Ling aims to situate its recreation in the genealogy of the great Chinese dramatic tradition. Nevertheless, its reiteration of the “national” tradition significantly changes the meaning of the previous versions, that is, the operatic as well as Lao She’s socialist reinterpretation, Lang-Ling’s version is a modernist rewriting of this family melodrama. It relocates the setting from dynastic China to contemporary Taipei, and it turns away from Confucian moral sentimentalist resolution by alienating kinship attachments. It starts with a brothel scene, where prostitute He Zhu is scheming with her customer Zhao Wan to extort Chi’s, Zhao’s boss, wealth. Zhao tells He Zhu that Chi used to have a daughter, Jing Feng, but that he has sent her away to a neighbor because he was too poor to raise her. Now he is rich and he desperately wants to be reunited with his lost daughter. He Zhu decides to show up as Jing Feng to Chi, attempting to inherit his wealth. Chi’s young wife, however, is clever enough to expose

¹⁶⁸ She Lao, Jieqing Hu and Xingzhi Wang, *Lao She ju zuo quan ji* (Beijing: Zhongguo xi ju chu ban she : Xin hua shu dian Beijing fa xing suo fa xing, 1982).

her scheme. Nevertheless, in a sudden turn, He Zhu turns out to be the real Jing Feng. Just when this ethical chaos is about to be resolved, Chi suddenly announces that his business has failed, a piece of news making all who are involved disillusioned and wanting to leave. The performance ends with the arrival of the pimp from the brothel, claiming to be the real boss of Chi's corporation.

Lang-Ling's adaptation departs from the previous two versions in the sense that it leaves the audience disoriented and perplexed without providing any solution. Furthermore, with the arrival of the pimp, it turns this melodrama into an absurdist play where reality and falsity blend into each other, creating a cognitive dizziness that unsettles all preconceived notions of true and false.

If Lang-Ling's *Hu Zhu* signifies the imminent destabilization of KMT's patriarchal nation state in the early 1980s, its melodramatic tampering with social reality will take full swing in the Little Theatre Movement, starting from the late 1980s after the lifting of the Martial Law. With the increasing crisis of national identity on the island, the failing patriarch in *He Zhu* will be even more severely challenged in the highly politicized experimental theatres emerging in the late 1980s.

With breaking political taboos as their primary agenda, the experimental theatres during this period heavily relied on non-conventional theatrical strategies to shock their audience as well as to provoke public awareness over tabooed political issues. For most of these troupes, their first concern is to break free from the constraints imposed upon them during the Martial Law era. They challenge the grand narratives of official history,

ridicule the rules of the disciplinary regime of KMT and, most importantly of all, attempt to address a central question---“what kind of body is the Taiwanese body?” Foregrounding this question, they seek to overcome this identity crisis, though not from the narratological level of speaking about one’s identity. Rather, as their signature aesthetics of “anti-narrative structure” and “non-representational” indicate, they deal with this crisis from the changing power dynamics between the national body and personal body politics.¹⁶⁹

The rise of the first queer theatre in Taiwan must be considered in this context. First emerging in 1988, the queer theatre of Critical Point shares many of the defining features of the experimental troupes, unseating language and text from its throne in the dramatic tradition. They put the actors’ bodies on the center stage, drawing the audience’s attention to the comportments, gestures, facial expressions, voices, and emotions of the actors. Tian Qi-yuan founded the Critical Point Theatre after he rose to prominence in the theatrical scene through winning the grand prize in National College Students’ Drama Contest.

What distinguishes the Critical Point Theatre from others is their audacious tempering with sexual matters. From the provocative deployment of sexually- inflected language to the explicit staging of sexual taboos, Tian Qi-yuan and his Critical Point

¹⁶⁹ Chung Mingder records this historical process in detailed narrative, in which he observes that even though most of these practitioners are never educated with Western avant-garde theatrical aesthetics, their theatrical creations are inherently a transcultural process, which is made possible by the logic of late capitalism in Taipei. That is, with the influx of American consumerist culture, the sudden surge of Mandarin pop culture, the advent of European art movies, and the return of U.S.-educated theatre scholars, the theatrical scenes in Taipei around this time adopt either Artaudian or Brechtian strategies, even without consciously “borrowing” their theories. See Chung, “The little theatre movement of Taiwan (1980-89),” 134–181.

Theatre unabashedly embrace all kinds of sexual taboos as a way to engage with the aforementioned political agendas. It is in their sexualization of political contestations that I place my queer readings of their theatrical aesthetics. In considering the queerness in their works, I observe a similar strategy with *The Crystal Boys*—a radical deconstruction of the ethico-political scripts of KMT Confucianism. This can be observed in their debut piece—*Mao Shih*(The Dead Body of Mao, 毛屍).

The title is a head-on collision with official ideology. Reminding the audience of the dead body of Chairman Mao, this title is a purposeful provocation against KMT's political taboo—the communist party. In explanation, Tian and his group reveal that this title is a pun on *Mao Shih* (The Mao-edited version of the *Book of Songs*), an important hermeneutic of an ancient collection of folk songs that is later turned into a Confucian classic for imperial examination. In so doing, the title *Mao Shih* states its two-fold purpose. First, by making the reference to Chairman Mao, Tian tries to overturn the political sovereignty of the KMT's self-proclaimed representative legitimacy of “Chinese” culture. Second, if Mao's cultural revolution becomes the KMT's pretext to launch the “Movement of Restoration of Chinese Culture,” then Tian aims to attack the official interpretation of the Confucian tradition as its target, deconstructing how KMT's Confucian moral regime, far from being a faithful reflection of the essence of Chinese culture, is indeed a political vehicle for disciplining the national body. With the ancient same-sex romance between a local Confucian scholar Zhang-zi and an aspiring scholar Hu Shih-xian as its focal point, *Mao Shih* eroticizes politics by overturning the

homosocial logic in the Confucian ethico-political system into a homosexual anarchistic carnival. A nonrealistic piece composed of a series of seemingly random, but purposefully structured dialogues, shouting, singing, dancing and poem-reciting, *Mao Shih* seems to follow Herbert Marcus's lead, staging an erotic rebellion against the suffocating orders of civilization. Nevertheless, as its liminal quality suggests, *Mao Shih*, rather than affirming the power and essence of the erotic force, is a poetic pondering on the politics of sexuality and the sexuality of politics. If anything, it is closer to a mock ritual of power and nothingness in the fashion of Jean Genet.

Its English title is rendered *Love Homosexual in Chinese*, a deliberate violation of the English syntax rule. If the creation of the homosexual subject, as Foucault has told us in *The History of Sexuality*, is a result of the historical sediments of modern discursive formations of sexuality, *Mao Shih*, with its awkward English subtitle, seems to suggest that this play is not about representations of homosexuals *per se*; rather, it is a theatricalization of the historical power mechanism behind KMT's governmentality, a deliberate laying bare of this regime's cultural management that will expose how homosexuality becomes a taboo in this particular form of governance.

The legitimate form of proper citizenship, in KMT's ruling, is very much constructed around the myth of nationalized Confucianism, a source of legitimacy with the sublime figure of Confucius at its center. *Mao Shih* appropriates the form of the ritual of *Zikongdadian* (The Confucius Worshipping Ritual), a state-sponsored national ritual held annually on the Teacher's Day, to subvert the divinity of this political spectacle.

Performed on a thrust stage, this mockery of a divine ritual is presented to the audience in an intimate setting. Surrounded by the audience on three sides, *Mao Shih's* alternative Confucius worshipping ritual, instead of demanding the viewing public to keep a respectful distance, invites them to cross the boundary between the divine and the profane, the transcendent and the immanent, reshuffling the neatly defined and strictly hierarchized social milieus.

Against the barrenness of the thrust stage, highly symbolic political objects--the national flag of Republic of China and the portrait of Dr. Sun Yet-san--are hung on the wall to create an eerie atmosphere of a death ritual. In line with the emptiness of the stage, the six characters are not given specific names, but instead serialized as A, B, C, D, E, and F. All dressed up in white robes and covered with white paint, the actors move across the stage like the walking dead with ritualistic bodily movements; their speech and articulations are executed in an incantational and monotonous pattern, evoking the feeling of a religious funeral.

On this ritualistic stage, a liminal state is opened between the sacred and the damned, for death and spirituality are fused together. Like shamans from an ancient time, the actors are mediators rather than impersonators—that is, they are vehicles conveying messages, thoughts, and feelings from another place, rather than actors who impersonate identifiable human beings. Nevertheless, unlike the shamans who proclaim to be subservient messengers for the supernatural, divinity or demons, they have no pretension to claim a privileged affinity or connectivity to the realm of the sublime. They bring the

Gods and demons to the earthly present moment on stage, creating miracles and omens with their immanent corporeality. They still speak and converse with language, but the linguistic registers are appropriated as semiotic toys for sound effects or hyperbolic resignification, that is, in the sense of Judith Butler's performativity. What is at stake here in this ritualistic deconstruction is the ideology of KMT's modernization project by way of Confucian moral sentimentalism.

Therefore, the play opens with a string of conversational word plays to satirize the ideology of KMT developmentalism:

A: He is no longer as erect as before.

B: Oh!

A: I mean it is merely a signifier, as we see a traffic sign.

B: you?

A: "Bumpy Road".

B: Can you replace it with another phrase?

A: "Dented Surface".

B: Where?

A: Down there!

B: I mean...

A: It is castrated!

B: (a long pause) Really?

A: It is destroyed by capitalism; burnt by hot capital flow and crushed by the devalued U.S. dollars. It can no longer squeeze out any maternal care; it is no more a bucolic scenery of perky mountains. It is as barren as a waste land; the two ...¹⁷⁰

¹⁷⁰ Tian Chi-yuan, "Mao Shih," in Lin jie dian ju xiang lu ju tuan, *Fan hua sheng zi* ([Taipei Shi]: Lin jie dian ju xiang lu ju tuan, 2004), 195–196.

The “he” in this conversation is a sliding subject position. The qualifying term, “erect,” might suggest that this third person pronoun should be an authority figure with phallic status, even though his authority is already declining. The conversation soon cancels out the absolute sacredness of any powerful signs. To the contrary, by relating this figure of power to a traffic sign, this conversation reveals the arbitrariness of the signification process, exposing the contingency of any kind of signifying mechanism. Then it quickly introduces a seeming critique of capitalism, making us wonder if the “he” might stand for the KMT regime, whose developmentalism facilitates the rampage of global capitalism, diminishing its role as a welfare state. This sexualization of political critique will eventually lead to a libidinalization of power struggle between the state and its oppressed people. The opening conversational repartees render the sublime figure of the “he” into an empty transcendental signifier. This unveiling will be continued with more seemingly illogical conversations that actually deconstruct the necessity of some conventional values, e.g. national ideology, progress, history, cultural icons, art, intellectuals, economic development, ethical codes. This series of iconoclastic deconstructions eventually leads to the final blow on the quintessential scared sign of Chinese Culture—Confucius. By posing the question “is Confucius homosexual?” to the audience, Tian’s ongoing ritualistic undoing of the sanctification of state ideology—cum-figures culminates in the final libidinalization of this radical interrogation.

This libidinalization starts with the chanting of poems from *The Book of Songs*, followed by the narrating of various homoerotic stories from Chinese history—i.e., Mi Zixia, An-ling, Long Yang, etc. In so doing, Tian excavates these hidden homoerotic facts from the historical ruins of the past, challenging the official grand narratives. KMT's appropriation of Confucianism invents a cultural past to sanction a mode of sexual feeling that is compulsorily heterosexual. By celebrating the ancestors' intimate feelings as unquestionably heterosexual, the moral regime of state sentimentality, as my previous analysis states, is to implement various developmentalist institutions—e.g. eugenics, population control, monogamous nuclear family, heteronormativity—for the purposes of capital production and accumulation. In light of this, Tian's "uncovering" of the homosexual past is not an attempt to reveal the hidden "truth" about the existence of homosexuality in the past; rather, this is an aesthetic intervention to trouble the officially sanctioned scripts of libidinal flows. It is not to build a history for the oppressed homosexuals. Nor is it an identity-based political satire that demands full citizenship for the sexually minoritized subjects. His uncovering of the homosexual past is to generate queer affect, demanding the state to listen to his voicing of a dissident mode of sentimentality—"their feelings are genuine; their intentions are authentic; true *qing* (love, feelings, emotions) does not distinguish homo or hetero eroticism."¹⁷¹

Tian's queer politics do not rely on a reified subject position to call for recognition; rather, by evoking "universal feeling," Tian is intervening in KMT's regime of sexual regulation by way of shared sentiments, an affective strategy to evoke empathy from the

¹⁷¹ Ibid., p. 208.

Other. This strategy eventually will need to take the form of an Oedipal gendered script. Before the final homosexualization of the Confucian ethico-political regime, the actors evolve into a play of power dynamics between mothers and sons, rendering the phallogocentrism of the Father an empty spot. Through a rational discussion about how the Mother-Son relationship is formed, Tian subverts the Father-Son ethical imperative in the official script, rendering the castration drama in the Oedipal script defunct. Tian's melancholic identification with the Mother, nevertheless, does not lead to a dwelling on loss or a princely attempt to recuperate the castrated self through subjugating the other. This melancholic identification with the Mother spawns a poetic ecstasy, a mode of critically seeking justice in poetic autonomy.

F: Are you crazy?

C: I am crazy! I want to crawl back to your womb and stay there forever. I would rather stay there sucking nutrition from you. Nutrition from my grandpa; IN Confucius's blood.

D: You are useless. You think even Confucius's fart can save more people than our own blood. You are narcissistic and lacking confidence. Half of the red cells in your blood belongs to your grandpa; the other half grows 53 small planets. They belong to the guy who wears a long robe with red and white stripes.

E: Don't insult Confucius. He is a saint.

D: I did not insult him. Doesn't he fart as well?¹⁷²

¹⁷² Ibid., p. 224.

This ritualistic deconstruction of the phallogocentrism of Confucianism will end with a parody of the ritual of singing the national anthem, a daily national educational act implemented from elementary throughout high school during the Martial Law era. By making the song of national sympathy into a love song, Tian ends this ritual with song and dance, transforming the seriousness of a state spectacle into a carnival of free libidinal flow.

The Maternal Alterity

My previous analysis of *Crystal Boys* and *Mao Shih* has demonstrated that, for *tongzhi* aesthetics and politics to emerge in post-Martial Law Taiwan, cultural expressions need to tamper with the official script of KMT's Confucian moral sentimentalism. In *Crystal Boys*, an affective strategy of rewriting brotherly love is deployed to transform the ethical imperative of hierarchized by age brothers into an ethical responsibility to alterity; in *Mao Shih*, the missing ethical position of the maternal in the Confucian script is introduced by Tian to disrupt the continuous patriarchal link between Emperor/Subject and Father/Son. The maternal in *Mao Shih* engenders the poeticization of politics, a signature of Tian's *tongzhi* aesthetics. Tian's dwelling on the maternal is not a pathological regression in the Freudian formulation; this dwelling will further lead to a theory of alterity by way of the maternal in his later pieces—*The Mulian Play* and *Mary Marlene*.

In psychoanalytic language, the maternal is a site of loss, the lost object of love that leads to melancholia or depression if one refuses to mourn over its doomed disappearance when one enters the Father's symbolic order. This designation of the maternal as loss, in Emanuel Levinas's theory of radical alterity, becomes a site of mercy where one's primary traumatic experience of separation and individualization can be accommodated and worked through for the ethical to emerge in this self-other split. As Claire Elise Katz tells us: "In Levinas's discussion, maternity does not function simply as a metaphor derived from the physical proximity between the mother and the child, although certainly he does not overlook the immediacy of this relationship. Levinas equates maternity with mercy (*rakhamin*, derived from the Hebrew word for uterus, *rekhem*), and mercy is the ethical response to the other."¹⁷³ While some feminist scholars have accused Levians of assigning a similar constitutive outside—a site that is excluded, but helps the male subject to suture the chasm between self and Other—to the psychoanalytic definition of the feminine, Jeffery T Nealon tells us otherwise:

I am nothing other than a function of the infinity of the other; I am subjected rather than doing the subjecting. To put it slightly differently, Levinas certainly concurs with social constructionists that "The idea of infinity is the social relationship" ("Philosophy," 54), but within that relationship the I is not the locus of power and privilege: the I is nothing other than performative response, that which says I after the others."¹⁷⁴

¹⁷³ Claire Elise Katz, *Levinas, Judaism, and the feminine the silent footsteps of Rebecca* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2003), 132, <http://site.ebrary.com/id/10088454>.

¹⁷⁴ Jeffrey T Nealon, *Alterity politics: ethics and performative subjectivity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1998), 168.

That is, if Levinas equates maternity with radical alterity, he does not see it as a site of absence or constitutive lack that drives symptomatic repetition to resolve difference for the self-same; rather, the maternal radical femininity is an affirmative alterity that cancels out the monadic subject, affirming the ethical as the first principle in the question of subject formation. The other, in Levinas's theorization, is not an anchoring point for self-referential ontological reconstitution; the other is a call for responsibility (though not in the sense of moral authority), for the openness of one's vulnerability to the infinity of the other. It is beyond the scope of this paper to talk about whether Levinas's concept of alterity restores the priority of a male ethical subject. What interests me is Levinas's prioritization of ethics over ontology, a reversal categorical process that distinguishes itself from the Lacanian theory of the decentered, desiring subject under the gaze of the Name of the Father. For the latter, the site of the other can easily become the site of lack and castration, yielding to a reading of a melancholic subject with perpetual symptoms; for the former, the affect of resentment is transformed into an affect of mercy, responsibility, and conviviality—positive affect that does not resolve the separation of self and other; rather, it focuses on the inseparable, undifferentiated community of multiple alterity.

Tian's *Mulian Play* is such a *tongzhi* aesthetics of alterity. Taken from another popular ritual in Taiwanese culture, the Ghost Festival, *The Mulian Play* theatricalizes another liminal state, cancelling the borders between the living and the dead, the sacred

and the profane, and the immanent and the transcendent. Unlike *Mao Shih*'s intention to subvert the political function of a state ritual, *The Mulian Play* is a queer appropriation of this age-old folk tradition in its offering of an alternative cultural imaginary to destabilize the ethico-political subject (read: male) in KMT's Confucian script. Deriving from the tradition of Ullambana sutra, the Ghost Festival in Taiwan marks the cultural heritage of the historical Confucianization of the Buddhist story of Maudgalyayana. The original story is about Maudgalyayana, who saves his mother from the hell of a hungry ghost after he reaches enlightenment. This story, after it comes to China, is Confucianized to instill a lesson of filial piety in it.¹⁷⁵ Tian's adaptation departs from the meaning of ancestor worship in a traditional Mulian play, an emphasis that is used to reinforce the ideology of filial piety; it revisits the gender politics inherent in the original narrative's depiction of human compassion as a story of downfall and redemption. It does not follow the Mulian story to craft a realistic narrative about how an enlightened son saves his mother from her downfall into the insatiable black hole of material desire, for this narrative can easily yield to a reading of gender politics that bifurcates masculinity and femininity along a moral hierarchy between soul and body. Tian instead creates an inseparable entity between Mulian and his mother, staging a Mulian Play about the meaning of mercy without moralizing it.

As the play starts, we see a group of modern day Taipei citizens coming on stage and complaining about their mundane worldly trouble to the audience. In so doing, Tian

¹⁷⁵ Alan Cole, *Mothers and sons in Chinese Buddhism* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1998).

presents a *mise-en-scene* of the ennui or banality of modern city life to us. If this pervasive feeling of ennui and banality in modern life indexes the constitutive lack in the Symbolic of the modern world, Tian is not satisfied with dwelling on this melancholic self-pity; he leads us to confront the ethical core of modern being—the face of the other in our pursuit of self-mastery. As this social realistic *mise-en-scene* is about to transition into a highly ritualistic performance, a crippled man comes on stage, encountering a homeless person begging for food. At first, he hesitates to give his own food to him. This hesitation is presented by Tian as an ongoing war between the masculine principle of self-preservation and the feminine principle of openness to the other. The disabled person ruminates over his decision, saying, “If it was my Mom, she would give him food without hesitation; if it was my Dad, he would walk away right away. He only knows how to socialize and make money.”¹⁷⁶ After this moment, the ritualistic performance of the Ghost Festival starts. Traditionally, in Taiwan, during the Ghost Festival, people believe that those who pass away in an untimely manner will return to the living world for appeasement and placation. In order to bring nirvana to those starving ghosts, people prepare actual food as offerings in a religious ritual. We can understand the socio-political meaning of this ritual as “the return of the resentful,” the temporary return of the others who are excluded outside of the Symbolic world of consciousness and rationality. This religious ritual can thus be understood as a symbolic act to reaffirm the pre-existing structure of law and justice by way of ritualistically resolving the inherent contradiction within such a structure. Therefore, in Confucianizing this ritual, the

¹⁷⁶ Ibid., p. 175

ancestors, in place of the nameless resentful, return to the site of the traumatic kernel. In this worshipping process, the living descendants can reconcile the unjust feeling of suffering in this current world by legitimizing their continuous existence with the name of the ancestors. Futurity lies in an elusive image of an offspring who will have a better life under the auspices of the ancestors. This temporal structure of hope opens up the space for the religious and the political. In aligning the past with the future, a present subject emerges as a subjugated location of consciousness in this affective structure of sentimental resolution and hope.

Tian's *Mulian Play* thus evokes maternal mercy not for sentimental resolution; it seeks to perpetuate the priority of alterity in one's ongoing traumatic encounter with the world. In order to showcase this difference between sentimental moral teaching and ethical responsibility to the other, Tian stages a Mulian religious ritual with the leading Buddhist master and a chorus. While the Buddhist master recites a series of non-linguistic mantras to save the wandering soul of a nameless woman, the chorus accompanying him takes on the task of interpreting karma as moral retribution. As the ritual gets to the part where the master is entering hell to redeem the lost soul, the identities between the savior and the saved suddenly can no longer be distinguished. In the scene titled "Humans are Flowers and Flowers are Dogs; Who are Human?," the humanistic subject of compassion is severely challenged in the original tale. Tian pushes his audience out of the comfort zone of humanist empathy; he disrupts the border between self and other to the extent that the religious morality of redemption is transvalued. The religious trope of downfall and

redemption is so deconstructed that the morality question becomes an ethical question about how one should justly relate to the other. Tian tells us that, to know “whether this is the human world or the hell?,” one does not need to refer to the imaginary boundaries; the borders between hell and human world exist within “you and me.”¹⁷⁷

Through the mouth of the merciful Buddhist monk, Tian ushers in a ritual of radical alterity where “humans and ghosts are but one life; mothers and sons are interconnected.”¹⁷⁸ Here, Tian’s *tongzhi* politics of radical alterity is staged by way of the maternal, a strategy leading to the indistinction between mother and son. This indistinction does not testify to the Freudian pathologization of male homosexuality as a regression to the maternal from the Oedipal script. Tian’s tarrying with the maternal is not a pathological overidentification with the mother; he deploys maternal love as Levinas’s concept of radical alterity to debunk the Oedipal myth, rendering the phallogocentrism behind it obsolete.

Tian’s aestheticization of radical alterity will take full swing in *Mary Marlene*, a non-linguistic experimental piece showing the ongoing erotic plays of two women, Mary and Marlene. When the piece opens with the background music of traditional Chinese lute, we see two young women, one voluptuous and one skinny, sit motionlessly next to each other with a table in between them. The voluptuous one is dressed in a floral long skirt and a very tight translucent tank top, revealing the curves of her breast; the skinny one is dressed in a very short black sheath dress, revealing her cleavage and legs. As the

¹⁷⁷ Lin jie dian ju xiang lu ju tuan, *Fan hua sheng zi*, 185.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid., 188.

music plays, without saying a word, the skinny one starts to move her wrist in a very slow but stylized manner. This simplistic mise-en-scene immediately evokes the typical setting of traditional Chinese opera—one table and two chairs, and the stylized hand movement of the actress is reminiscent of the stylized comportments of Chinese operative acting. As the performance unfolds, the audience does not hear any conversation between the actresses, but will experience instead bodily interactions between the two. Their interactions, nevertheless, will never be able to be deciphered through meaningful dialogues. They will touch, grab, caress, pull, and smile or cry at each other with heightened emotions and theatricalized sensuality. Filled with sensuousness and physical intimacy, their interactions, punctuated by distinctive types of music (i.e. classical Western music, ethnic music, new age), are presented as a series of emotional trials and tribulations of a couple of female lovers. Nevertheless, if one is to read this piece as a representation of lesbian eroticism, one will encounter the difficulty of reading the erotic intimacy in it in representational terms, due to the lack of intelligible linguistic codes. As the director explicitly states, this piece is inspired by Ronald Barthes's deconstruction of the normative lexicon of romantic love in *Lovers' Discourse*. A non-representational reading of this piece might be more feasible.

But if Tian's primary purpose is to reveal the fictiveness in the grammar of love, why doesn't he choose a pair of heterosexual lovers? Even in choosing a couple of same-sex lovers, why does he shy away from the male homoeroticism that he himself can identify with? Why a lesbian couple? My reading is that Tian's deployment of

“lesbianism” here cannot be read through the lens of same-sex identity politics, but must be considered in relation to the politics of desire. To further my discussion, I would like to go back to my earlier observation of this piece’s evocation of traditional Chinese opera. This evocation immediately brings us back to one of the recurrent motifs in Tian’s works—his critical assessment of the Confucian family-state system. As my earlier discussion shows, women in traditional Chinese kinship culture can only appear as the patriarch’s kinswomen—that is, they are primarily the wife of the husband, and secondly the daughter of the father and the mother of the son (these two latter kinship positions are derivative of the Father/Son category). It is rare for women to appear as independent subjects who can enjoy the freedom to form friendship with other men in a nonhierarchical relationship. The horizontal realm of friends, as designed by Confucianism, is reserved primarily for men to form brotherly relationships that exist outside of the kinship network. Women can rarely be “friends” with other men outside of the domestic setting, let alone with other women. However, female-female friendship can be exceptionally found in “intimate friends in the inner chamber,” a relationship of sisterhood that is derivative of the brother category, and hence confined to the domestic sphere and rendered invisible.

By eroticizing female-female intimacy in public, Tian challenges the lexicons of intimacy in the Confucian kinship system by way of its constitutive outside—sisterly love. His eroticization of sisterly love, though with an explicit deconstructive agenda to undo the divine belief in romantic love, allows us to see an ongoing ontological drama between

self/other without the spectre of the phallogocentric centrality. The source of eroticism, as Mary and Marlene display, is proliferated onto all parts of the body, all voices and gestures, as well as food, music, and the sheer sound effects of linguistic codes. The opening of sensorial boundaries in this erotic play creates a phenomenological carnival where the boundaries between self and alterity are dismantled. The sensorium goes wild and consciousness goes crazy. This sensorial wildness allows us to “feel” the ontological wrestling between self and other, as the drama between the two presents a series of ongoing drives for attachment and separation. In a Lacanian script, this struggling between self and other, as the eroticization of the power dynamics suggest, will lead to the birth of desiring subject—a subject born out of subjection to the Other in search for *jouissance* from the Other. One’s entry into the linguistic realm of the Symbolic marks a successful passage into this structure. However, when Mary and Marlene start to speak, we do not see them produce intelligible signifiers, but rather a series of singsong sounds that go beyond signifying function, continuing to generate sensorial enjoyment out of the sheer audial quality of the words.

Marlene: I used to think in this way. Water, is water.

Mary: Rice. I used to think in this way. Rice, is rice, BB.

Marlene: Yes, BB.¹⁷⁹

This linguistic game will lead to a section called “we are our own demons,” in which the two women engage in a verbal repartee, name dropping brand names, in order to

¹⁷⁹ Ibid., p. 81.

demarcate their social relationships of production and consumption. Tian is making a political statement about one's alienation amidst capitalist society's commodity fetishism, an illusory power that also relies on the symbolic power of words. Nevertheless, this playful reiteration only leads to a subversion of the sanctity of the signifiers. Feminists have long criticized the phallogocentrism in the Lacanian formulation of the Symbolic; here, the linguistic play between the two exposes the emptiness behind the stabilizing promise of the phallogocentrism in the Symbolic. The women's acquisitions of language do not help to symbolically locate their positions in the signifying chain, but instead perpetuate the subject's bordering with the Symbolic, a perpetual failure that prevents the emergence of a transcendental ego from resolving the differences between self and other. This "failure" of linguistic acquisition leads to an ecstasy of verbal promiscuity. As Marlene keeps counting numbers and dropping terms, Mary gives a speech on the great intellectual genealogy of modern thinkers, not to sanctify or canonize them, but trivialize or parodize them through eroticizing the genealogy of the male-dominant intellectual world: "When Marx is masturbating, Freud stands next to him, saying he should place a mirror in front of his penis. At this time, Scheherazade shows up in the mirror, telling him stories from *The 1001 Nights*, Her endless stories prevent him from coming."¹⁸⁰

Once again, it is in this endlessly prolonged expectation of the final coming that the humanistic intellectual attempt to transcend the traumatic split between self and other is rendered futile. In Tian's rendition, this futility, not a melancholic dwelling on self-pity or an aggressive recuperation to erase difference, is the openness to the infinite possibility

¹⁸⁰Ibid., p. 85.

of alterity, as represented by Scheherazade's tales of maternal calling. In this infinite horizon of maternal alterity, the intellectual humanist impulse to suture this incomplete world, either through a Freudian eroticization of the ontological struggle between self/other in a structure of desire, or the Marxist materialization of the master/slave dialectic in history, is frustrated. One's responsiveness to alterity enables the ongoing queer tales of Scherazade.

From the 1970s to the early 1990s, with the escalation of social contradiction, an identity politics of resentment, demarcated along the bifurcated ethnicities between mainlanders and local Taiwanese, is invented to articulate the questions of social injustice and unequal distribution. This politics of resentment further leads to a melancholic national identity of wounded attachment surrounding the perceived loss of "homeland." Queer cultures emerged in this historical condition of possibility. Their visibility is indeed enabled by this rupture of national identity; nevertheless, they mourn over the loss of Father's dominion, but not for an aggressive recuperation or a melancholic self-annihilation. Their mourning is beyond melancholia for the engendering of a *tongzhi* politics of radical alterity, from which a new ethics is foregrounded in order for the increasingly self-centered, post-capitalist subjects to realize that the other always comes first in our ontological formation. Encountering the face of the other, *tongzhi* politics and aesthetics are not satisfied with winning political recognition. In moments of affective exchanges, *tongzhi* aesthetics and politics emerge for multiplicities to come, with the invitation from the future horizon of the infinite other.

CHAPTER 3

BETWEEN TRAUMA AND NOSTALGIA: QUEER DESIRE IN POST-SOCIALIST CHINA

In chapter 2, I detailed the historical emergence of queer expressions in fiction and theatre during post-Martial Law Taiwan. Situating this emergence in the larger affective structure of melancholia and resentment, I intend to show how queer expressions participate in the collective cultural attempts to rewrite the official kinship or familial scripts. Part of the phenomenon of national identity crisis in post-Martial Law Taiwan, queer expressions, nonetheless, do not share the affective politics of melancholia and resentment--affects stemming from the politics of recognition in this collective identity crisis. Queer expressions, as my discussions have demonstrated, entail a *tongzhi* politics of radical alterity, an ethical call to engage with “the face of the other.”

In this chapter I shift my focus to the first queer texts in post-Socialist China. Similarly, I situate their emergences in the affective structure of trauma and nostalgia in post-socialist China, an immediate change of structure of feeling after the frenzy of leftist revolutionary catastrophe. As manifested by the cultural phenomenon of root-searching and scar-healing, this new affective structure entails a cultural attempt to rebuild a Chinese identity that is compatible with the new neoliberalist order. In this major change of the cultural landscape, the question of “home” or “family” returns. As opposed to previous socialist attempts to dismantle the unit of home, post-socialist China

preoccupied itself with the question of how to reconstitute home as a basis for recuperating a Chinese identity. I will demonstrate that post-socialist queer texts, rather than participating in this collective ritual of homecoming, are concerned about the changing contours of the public and the private, insisting on a critical attitude towards the emerging normativity.

Before I start to analyze how representative cultural texts in post-Socialist China attempt to reorganize “home” in response to the phenomenon of root-searching and scar-healing, I find it worthwhile to provide an overview of how the socialist regime restructures feelings, which Haiyan Lee defines as “the socialist grammar of emotion.” This mapping can further allow us to see how sentimentalism returns in the post Socialist era to reconstruct the space of home.

The Socialist Grammar of Emotion

According to Haiyan Lee, “the kingpin of the socialist grammar of emotion is the collective definition of sentiment in which love is shorn of particularistic or personalistic valence and is to be exclusively aligned with the universal category: class.”¹⁸¹ What Lee defines as the socialist grammar of emotion has been explicitly laid out in Mao’s cultural policy since the Yanan period. Regarding Confucianism as the remnants of the *fengjian* (feudalistic) era, and liberalism as the sentimentalism of petite bourgeoisie, the socialist regime embraced a total transformation of the social fabric into a socialist

¹⁸¹ Lee, *Revolution of the Heart*, 286.

national body, with the workers, the peasants, and the soldiers as the subject of the society. In this socialist transformation, literature and the arts, upheld as the tools for “class struggle,” take on the task of such a spiritual transformation of its people, as this transformational mission has been explicitly stated by Mao Zedong’s *Talks on Literature and Art at the Yan’an Forum* in 1942. Pronouncing that literature and art must be created for the people, Mao foregrounds the category of workers, peasants, and soldiers, the three representative classes from below as the agent of New China. Since the wide circulation of the party-produced music opera—*The White Haired Girl*—in the late 1940s, a highly theatricalized melodramatic form has been appropriated by the socialist party-state to evoke the political passions among its people, a collective aspiration towards an ideology of socialist revolution. That is, for the oppressed to become the real agent of history, they have to go through a process of ideological-cum-emotional trials and tribulations in order to achieve a final moment of political awareness to topple the ruling class. This kind of heightened socialist drama, either in the form of a saga or of Bildungsroman, relies on the melodramatic form¹⁸² partly for its emotive force to affect people and partly for its emotionalized and dichotomized notions of good and evil—a bifurcation aligned with the socialist comrades and their adversaries. If early family melodramas and Nora plays all intend a sentimental resolution towards the end, the difference of these socialist melodramas lies in their refusal of resolution. This form seeks a total reversal of the power dynamics between the dichotomized protagonist and antagonist, in a moment of passionate triumph where the sublime object of socialist ideology is sanctified.

¹⁸² Though in official retheorics, they all belong to the category of “socialist realism.”

In this theatricalized grammar of socialist belonging, the pre-existing organizing units or concepts, i.e. family, individual, romantic love, kinship, and interpersonal intimacy, are all subsumed under the super-sign of the party-state or the untranscendable horizon of the people. Unlike the KMT's Confucian sentimental morality, which yokes liberalist sentimentalism with the Confucian ethico-political system, the PRC's socialist lexicon of feelings is an encompassing political passion that erases individualistic differences under revolutionary fanaticism.¹⁸³

For example, Yang Mo's (1917-1996) representative female Bildungsroman, *The Song of Youth* (published in 1958), is exemplary of such a formulaic deployment. Telling the story of the life-changing journey of Lin Daojing, a young petite bourgeois and female intellectual, *The Song of Youth* is an overt political allegory, in which Lin's personal downfall and final redemption are suggestive of an individual's struggle to eventually achieve a socialist revolutionary mission. As Lin attempts to run away from the fate of being objectified by the male-dominated world, she self-exiles herself from her bourgeois family by seeking shelter at a school and working as a teacher. Nevertheless, the schoolmaster, still part of the old evil patriarchy, tricks her by selling her to a local mogul. Just when she was about to throw herself into the ocean, a liberal-minded poet student from Beijing University saves her and offers her a home to take root in. Lin, not content to be confined to the domestic sphere, ventures out to befriend a male communist member. Under the communist's persuasion, Lin makes up her mind to break out of her

¹⁸³ Haiyan Lee analyzes how the socialist regime appropriates pre-existing affective structures to re-codify its presentations of feelings in a highly theatrical mode. See Lee, *Revolution of the Heart: A Genealogy of Love in China*, pp. 286-296.

liberalist husband's control and devotes herself to socialist revolutions. This canonical socialist realistic fiction, though it prizes itself for its awakening depictions of social reality, very much deploys melodramatic elements for its political purpose. Lin's femininity, similar to the sympathetic female characters in melodramas, is the featured narrative focal point where the readers' identificatory attachment is channeled. As she goes downward from her original home of bourgeois respectability to a series of dehumanizing treatments, the melodramatic ideology of familial belonging, which is always associated with sympathetic femininity, is evoked only to be rewritten here. Lin's ongoing encounters with two men, the liberalist college student and the communist, symbolically index how the definition of home is reconceptualized twice in order to debunk the false hope of bourgeois domestic belonging and to replace this bankrupt liberalist promise with a socialist ideology of belonging. Lin's changing codifications of femininity therefore mark progress towards a political awareness, a transformational process that witnesses her weak bourgeois sentimental femininity gradually remade into a strong, socialist, militant woman.¹⁸⁴

The affective deployment of this political Bildungsroman is visually made explicit in the movie version. Along with other socialist films made during the 17 years before the Cultural Revolution, the cinematic version of *The Song of Youth* (1959, dir. Cui Wei, Chen Huaikai) deploys classical Hollywood narrative techniques, rather than strengthening the psychological realism of a bourgeois selfhood, to foster the

¹⁸⁴ See Mo Yang, *Qing chun zhi ge* (Beijing: Beijing chu ban she : Beijing shi yue wen yi chu ban she, 1998).

transformative process of socialist ideology replacing bourgeois selfhood. With Lin Daojing as the driving force behind the narrative process, the causal logic of Lin's disturbance and struggles allows the audience to embark on a long journey with her into her final political awareness of socialist passion. As Chris Berry's detailed formal comparative analysis indicates, this cinematic version uses "relays," "mirroring," "heightened engagement," and "epistemological command" to position its targeted audience, securing the gaze of the viewing public.¹⁸⁵ For example, before Lin wholeheartedly devotes herself to the revolution, she encounters, in a sequence where she gets off from a train, a crowd of patriotic students protesting against the Japanese invasion. The frame foregrounds the passionately protesting students through Lin's point of view. With the camera panning across a panorama of the commotions, Lin serves as a relaying point for the audience to feel and witness the political passion of the crowds. Lin's position in the frames as an observer will gradually be changed and moved to the forefront. The mirroring sequences between Lin and her morally dichotomized male counterparts—her liberalist husband and the communist comrade—further visually construct Lin's inner struggle. This struggle will be overcome in a seemingly romantic scene in which Lin and her male communist counterpart are rowing a boat on a scenic lake. This sequence is an example of how a typical romantic montage can be appropriated for a socialist ideology. Rather than presenting a couple of lovers dwelling on their

¹⁸⁵ Chris Berry analyzes some representative movies from this era, showing us how their formalistic features work to generate socialist ideology. The emotive and identificatory aspects are reflected in the four cinematic techniques he identifies. See Chris Berry, *Postsocialist cinema in post-Mao China: the cultural revolution after the Cultural Revolution* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 52–75.

mutual admiration and yearning for intimacy, this sequence is a serious moment of epistemological engagement, in which the communist comrade impassions Lin by telling her that she is already qualified to be officially admitted to the Communist party. What follows this quintessential romantic moment is not a nuptial union between the two sexes, but a triumphant moment of Lin's final union with the party. With heightened emotions, this moment of triumph expresses a typical emotional resolution, in which we see a close-up of the protagonist, followed by a close-up of a political symbol (a flag, or a statue of Mao) from a lower angle. Through this elevated affective moment, the pedagogy of Lin's political awareness is achieved when her eyes are aligned with the red flag in an angle of admiration.

Similarly, *Woman Basketball Player No. 5* (1957) and *The Red Detachment of Women* (1964) both follow the formula of the affective pedagogy of women—a process of political transformation that witnesses the final triumph of socialist camaraderie over bourgeois romantic love. These movies appropriate the trope of the innocent, suffering woman to elevate a discourse of socialist political belonging. As Dai Jinghua succinctly summarizes:

What is exiled is not 'love' but 'body.' The exile of love and body is to achieve a discourse of overcoming personal desire, eliminating the individualism and possible subversiveness in romantic love. The sacrifice or disappearance of object of desire causes the suspension of desire, transforming it into a drive for revolutionary career. This is a cultural recodification of a typical romantic story: the devotion of a pure

female body into the great enterprise of communism.¹⁸⁶

If the socialist movies that feature the transformation of a suffering female character index the female body's final entry from the private bourgeois sphere into a putative horizontal realm of the socialist public, the male peasants, workers, and soldiers who fight to win this public sphere do not enjoy the absolute transcendental phallic position in these new political landscapes. Their concerted efforts, usually constructed with the image of crowds, are deployed to secure the untranscendable horizon of the party-state, the ultimate name of the Father.

This socialist grammar of political belonging reaches its pinnacle in the model plays created during the era of the Cultural Revolution. As the ending of *The Red Lantern* suggests, the Confucian family based upon a blood-related kinship structure is replaced with a communist family that is not delimited by the kinship line; in this new communist family, all individuals are connected by a shared camaraderie under the leadership of the party.¹⁸⁷ This political reorganization of the family order introduces the masculinization of femininity by way of de-sexualization, a heroic making of women warriors for the Chinese socialist regime. A reversed gender and sexual logic is deployed to feminize the perceived villains, such as the landlords, the capitalists, and the KMT associates. Overt displays of sexuality, in the socialist lexicon, are considered to be signs of weakness and degeneracy. Such logic, as Rosemary A. Roberts's cogent analysis of the bodily

¹⁸⁶ Jinhua Dai, *Xie ta liao wang: Zhongguo dian ying wen hua 1978-1998* (Taipei Shi: Yuan liu chu ban gong si, 1999), 117.

¹⁸⁷ See a synopsis of this play by Roberts, *Maoist model theatre*, 31-33.

comportments of male bonding in the model plays indicates, is secured by the actors' still and straight bodily movements in an effort to make sure the homosociality in camaraderie does not transgress into the taboo zone of homosexuality.¹⁸⁸ One can further Roberts' analysis in looking at the remaking of female characters here. Their masculinization follows the exact same logic of de-sexualization to successfully yoke them to the horizontal plane of homosocial camaraderie.¹⁸⁹

Scar and Nostalgia in the Post-Socialist Era

The Cultural Revolution ends with the fall of the Gang of Four in 1975. The political mobilization during the past 10 years of upheavals induced immediate traumatic memories right after the trial of the Gang of Four, an event marking Mainland China's transition, along with the new leader Deng Xiaoping's ideology of the four modernizations, into a post-Socialist era. As the immediate cultural phenomena, across media, of *shanghen* (scar) and *xungen* (root-searching) indicate, overcoming the historical trauma from the past and reconstructing a "Chinese" identity are prioritized as the most important cultural and political agendas in the early years of the post-Socialist era. As Ban Wang succinctly observes, Chinese intellectuals, in the aftermath caused by the Cultural Revolution, pick up Walter Benjamin's view of history as catastrophe to revisit their immediate past. This collective rewriting of history is a reflection of an

¹⁸⁸ Ibid., p. 243-244.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid., p. 198-214.

identity crisis, a crisis leading to “a return to a romantic notion of subjectivity.”¹⁹⁰

Wang’s observation of the rise of a romantic liberalist subject echoes Lisa Rofel’s tracing of the emergence of the “desiring subject” in post-Socialist China. Tying her concept to the larger question of how global neoliberalism changes the making of human subjects in the post-Socialist era, Rofel upholds “desire” as a historically and culturally constructed site where new subject positions are created through the liberalist market system.¹⁹¹

While Wang observes a problematic embrace of the liberalist ideology of individualism, at the expense of the collective, in the elitist circles of intellectuals, avant-garde artists and modernist aesthetics, Rofel, as an anthropologist,¹⁹² keenly observes that this neoliberalist project of cosmopolitan subject formation is very much a part of state-engineered policies. She tells us: “neoliberalism in China is a *national* project about global reordering. The project is to remake public national public culture. Only because neoliberalism is a national imaginary about a post-Cold War world.”¹⁹³ Rofel analyzes a popular melodramatic text for TV, 1991’s *Yearnings* as a space of the popular imaginary, through which the Chinese viewing public tests out its understandings of national identity, state domination, market economy, and the divide between the personal and the public in

¹⁹⁰ Ban Wang, “Postrevolutionary Trauma and The Reconstruction of History,” in *Illuminations from the Past: Trauma, Memory and History in Modern China*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004, p. 104.

¹⁹¹ Lisa Rofel, *Desiring China: experiments in neoliberalism, sexuality, and public culture* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007), 7–21.

¹⁹² For example, Wang states: “Yet in romanticizing the individual identity of a liberal humanist kind, the danger is to eschew the collective historical experience. In the 1980s, this was not sensed a problem. It was in the 1990s, when private experience was becoming atomic and depoliticized, that a degenerate version of experience went hand in hand with the erasure of personal identity.” Please see Ban Wang, p. 105.

¹⁹³ Lisa Rofel, *Desiring China: Experiments in Neoliberalism, Sexuality and Public Culture*. Duke University: Durham and London, 2007, p 20.

the immediate catastrophe after the political upheavals of June 4th. Her textual analysis reveals a melodramatic resolution of the emerging social contradiction in the first 10 years of post-Socialist reform. She observes an aesthetic characteristic, *suku* (“speaking bitterness”), a tradition inherited from the socialist era, as the defining affective deployment in this televisual melodrama. This deployment, through evoking strong feelings of loss and pain, aims to overcome the traumatic past and to aspire for a brighter future. Rofel’s study of this landmark televisual melodramatic text echoes Ban Wang’s critical bifurcation between Xie Jin’s film melodrama and the fifth generation films in the 1980s. Ban regards Xie’s melodramas as attempts of the popular cultural imaginary to undo the unresolved social and historical contradictions left from the era of extreme leftist revolutions, while treating the fifth generation films, with the example of Tian Zhuangzhuang’s *The Blue Kite*, as examples that generate critical historical consciousness about the traumatic past. That is, if in the post-Socialist Era, the narrative mode of “telling bitterness” dwells on the affects of pain and nostalgia, this affective mode of recounting the past, to yoke Rofel’s study with Wang’s, takes on two modalities—the melodramatic mode that seeks to resolve tensions, antagonism, and dissonance with emotive transcendence, and the critical mode that, rather than resolving the unresolved, brings the audience to confront “the wounds” in a “sobering way of remembering the Cultural Revolution and other historical events, and hence a way of better understanding ourselves.”¹⁹⁴

¹⁹⁴ Ban Wang, *Illuminations from the past: trauma, memory, and history in modern China* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2005), 162.

Regardless of the difference of these two modes, I observe a similar deployment of affect in both. If we think of the structure of melancholia (the feeling of loss attached to the mode of telling bitterness about the past) and nostalgia (the desire to rediscover some “good old ‘Chinese’ days” in this present moment) as the defining framework of feelings in the post-Socialist Era, we, per Rofel’s and Wang’s studies, can tentatively observe that what lies behind this affective structure are larger questions about how a Chinese subject can form a critical or uncritical consciousness about the historical traumas in the past, and how the relations with the immediate traumatic past might index a post-Socialist Chinese subject’s repositioning in an increasingly globalized world of transnational capitalism. What Rofel means by “desiring subject,” apart from its engendering by the globalized, neo-liberalist logic of market and consumption, is also a traumatized subject’s *desire* to overcome the loss caused by the ravaging effects of China’s re-embrace of capitalist modernity. In light of the aforementioned analysis, if the emergence of queer expressions in the post-Socialist era is part and parcel of the collective rise of various desiring subjects, the significance of queer desires must be considered against the dominant affective structure of nostalgia and scar. In line with Rofel’s and Wang’s studies, I regard the melodramatic mode as a dominant expression in this structure of feelings, seeking to understand how this mode emotively resolves the lingering effects of historical trauma. Through a revisiting of how gender and sexuality is deployed in Xie Jin’s melodramas, I attempt to elucidate how the return of familial sentimentalism helps to facilitate such a melodramatic therapeutic process.

The Sentimental Male and Feminine Recuperation

Already an active film director within the state-sponsored film industry during the socialist era, Xie Jin is famous for his use of melodramatic and sentimental elements for political purposes. Like my previous overview of *The Red Detachment of Women* shows, Xie Jin, as someone who already swam in the urban sentimentalism of pre-socialist Shanghai film culture, is very adept in the art of sentimentalizing human relationships. Nevertheless, his cinematic sentimentalism does not etiologically arrive at a romanticization of bourgeois love; rather, it is usually strategically transposed into an affirmation of socialist political passion. However, his politicization of bourgeois sentimentalism takes a dramatic turn from the 1980s on. With three historical melodramas, namely *The Legend of Tianyun Mountain* (1980), *The Herdsman* (1982), and *Hibiscus Town* (1986), we witness the return of romantic love in his cinematic sentimentalism, a return that reinstates gendered politics in the melodramatic mode. Here we see femininity sanctified by way of sentimentalized virtues for the purpose of recuperating a Chinese male subject from the ruins and catastrophe of extreme leftist movements, a sentiment-based male subject who embodies the surviving essence of Chinese traditional culture and who possesses the capability to rise again in a new world order of global capitalist modernity. The way to recuperation, as previous patterns have suggested, is through the sacrificial principle of sentimentalized female

virtues-cum-romantic feelings. For example, though *The Legend of Tianyun Mountain* is told in the retrospective narrative voice of a female protagonist, the narrative actually uses the three major female protagonists' entangled point of views to make up a picture of the male protagonist—Luo Qun, a nationalistic and idealist old school intellectual who was branded as a “rightist” by a calculating male counterpart who climbs up the ladder within the party-state system because of his well-measured ambitions. The females are deployed to restore Luo Qun's moral and political integrity, a redemptive process that culminates in the melodramatic winter sequence, where Luo's star-crossed lover carries his weakened body on a sleigh through a winter storm while singing an emotionally heightened folk song, whose lyrics run: “mountain roads are winding; snow storm is ravaging. No matter how difficult the journey is. We encounter and our hearts are connected.” As the lyrics indicate, the female's perseverance and persistence paves the way for the male protagonist to come “home,” rising from the ashes of revolutionary catastrophe. One can observe a similar gendered politics of national subject recuperation in his following two films.

The Herdsman (1982) tells the story of the vicissitudes of a family. Xu Jingsan, an overseas Chinese businessman, returns to China after the revolutionary era to look for his long lost son. He left his wife and son alone at the eve of the outbreak of the Cultural Revolution, embarking on a journey to the U.S. Left alone, his son, Xu Lingjun, became an orphan after his mother passed away. His destitution was further exacerbated when the revolution broke out. Due to his father's fleeing to the U.S., he was branded as a “rightist”

and exiled to the wilderness of Northwestern China. After his arrival in the Northwest, he befriended local nomads and survived the harsh and clement weather of that area. He was further awarded a helping wife and a happy marriage, working as a herdsman. After this long separated father and son got reunited, the son declined the father's offer to emigrate to the U.S. and stayed with his wife and fellow herdsman to keep cultivating the Northwestern area.

Hibiscus Town follows Hu Yuyin, a happily married young woman who runs a successful roadside food stall selling spicy beancurd. Unfortunately, just when her business is about to prosper, the “anti-rightist movement” breaks out and she is branded as a “new rich peasant” by two politically minded opportunists, Wang and Lee. As the story unfolds, Hu and another politically marked man, Chin, went through a series of persecutions until the early 1980s when the wrongdoings from the revolutionary era are rectified. Hu and Chin, after being restored from the states of persecution, become happily married couple, restarting their personal enterprising business, while Wang and Lee are punished with losing their minds, caught in the frenzy of the revolutionary era, unable to move on for the new era.

As feminist film critic Dai Jinhua concludes: “in the new era, stories of desire/sex/sexuality become carriers and packages of political and historical narratives. That is, a specific textual formation of value, or, ways of reward and punishment is formed through the trope of home: the just will be granted with wish fulfillment and a

complete family, whereas the unjust will be alone with a broken family.”¹⁹⁵ This production of desiring subjects in Xie’s cinematic melodrama, in other words, signals the return of Confucian familialism, a patriarchal structure of moralized feelings that seeks reparation in restoring a male Chinese subject from the ruins of leftist revolutions through the affective labors of the female characters. As Ma Ning summarizes, “Xie Jin’s melodrama, for instance, is noted for its excessive play with Confucian ethical codes and Communist political codes for moral clarification and expressivity. The function of the performative rhetoric is to articulate virtuous suffering, which arouses audience sympathy and contributes to the final vindication of the victim when a new regime comes to power.”¹⁹⁶

East Palace, West Palace

Against this larger affective structure, I attempt to discuss the socio-political and aesthetic significance of the first “queer” texts of the post-Socialist era—*East Palace, West Palace* (1991) and Lin Yingyu’s adaptation of *The Maids* (2001).

Starting as a documentary project by one of the sixth generation directors, Zhang Yuan, *East Palace, West Palace* came out as an experimental narrative film after Zhang decided to work with Li Yinhe and Wang Xiaobo, a married sociologist and

¹⁹⁵ Dai Jinhua, *Xie Ta Liao Wang: Zhongguo Dian Ying Wen Hua 1978-1998*. Taipei Shi: Yuan liu chu ban gong si, 1999, p. 121.

¹⁹⁶ Ning Ma, "Signs of angst and hope: History and melodrama in Chinese fifth-generation cinema," *Screen : the journal of the Society for Education in Film and Television*. 44.2 (2003): 192.

writer/scholar who first venture to engage in sociological research on Chinese male homosexual lives.¹⁹⁷ With Wang as the screenwriter, *East Palace, West Palace* is a cinematic adaptation of Wang's fiction and play by the same name. I will discuss how queerness is constructed visually, narratively and theatrically in these three mediums, exploring the similarities and differences for the purposes of unpacking how queerness is actually a sexualized critique of an emerging normative gendered national politics, as well as a critical valence to delay the melodramatic tendency towards resolution, to produce a critical historical consciousness, and to launch a critique of the emerging acquisitive individualism in the market logic of pleasure and profit.

The cinematic version starts with a camera slowly panning across a seemingly deserted Chinese garden in a palace, to the background music of a female voice singing the line “niao qing shichui lai xian ting yuan” (“the graceful beams of sunlight in spring come into the garden of leisure”), from a classical *Kun* opera, *The Peony Pavilion*. The slowness of the camera creates the effect of the unfolding of a traditional Chinese landscape painting, which resonates with the classical feeling evoked by the *Kun* opera. The textual allusion to *The Peony Pavilion* runs throughout the entire film, as this music recurrently emerges at moments in the film when the homosexual character Ah Lun makes references to an ancient story about how an executioner captivates a woman to be his wife, thus creating a cross-reference between queer desire and the celebration of *qing*

¹⁹⁷ Wang had already written the theatrical and fictional versions of *East Palace, West Palace*, but could not find a publisher or theatrical company to release them. After Zhang approached him, he suggested that they use his theatrical play and fiction as a starting point to develop the film version. Ironically, it was after the film was released internationally at Cannes Festival and gained publicity that Wang's fiction and play were finally published.

(feelings, emotions, sentiments) in *The Peony Pavilion*. Upheld and canonized as the quintessential literary text representing the Confucian principle of feelings, *The Peony Pavilion*, in this contemporary moment, is often picked up as a representative text showing how traditional Chinese culture already possesses the sources for modern sentiment-based subjects of genuine feelings. In evoking *The Peony Pavilion* in such a culturalist visual fashion, *East Palace, West Palace*, in line with the root-searching movement, visually and aurally constructs a cultural space of “Chineseness” on screen, even if only to critically deconstruct it.

The elegance of these classical Chinese cultural elements will soon be undone when the camera cuts to the scene of a public restroom, where two men encounter each other. What follows this encounter is a scene of interpellation, in which a policeman demands to see a photo ID and a bike permit from Ah Lun, an effeminate homosexual cruising for sex. The action of the ID check performatively establishes the power relationship between Ah Lun and the police officer, drawing a moral line to secure the homosocial hierarchy between the two from the possible connotations of a homosexual encounter. This performative moment is a pivotal one that sets the stage for the whole film. Chris Berry’s analysis of the film, drawing upon a modified theory of Butlerian performativity, suggests that the highly dramatized scenes of power games throughout the film are moments of performativity that demonstrate “the contradictions that characterize the contemporary Chinese postsocialist condition.”¹⁹⁸ What Berry means by this is that, to

¹⁹⁸ C Berry, “Staging gay life in China: East Palace, West Palace (Zhang Yuan, 1996),” *JUMP CUT* 42 (1998): 4.

consider the performativity of queerness in those highly dramatized scenes of power subjection and resistance in the film, one must situate it in the historical condition of post-Socialist China, a time period that witnesses the waning of state control of the public sphere and, in turn, the state's attempt to keep the increasing public sphere under its command. This social contradiction in the state's attempts to supervise an increasingly privatized public sphere is performatively re-enacted as a perverse and sado-masochist sexual power game between Ah Lun and Xiao Shi the policeman, signifying the ongoing battle between homosociality and homosexuality.

To understand how *East Palace, West Palace* underscores such a sexualized critique of post-Socialist new sexual normativity, we should turn to how politics is eroticized in the text. Song Hwee Lim looks at the deployment of femininity in this film as a key component to understanding its queerness. Lim foregrounds Ah Lun's confessional mode of narrative about his own subjectivity as the clue for us to understand how this theatricalized power game can be subversive. Lim tells us that Ah Lun's self-feminization, rather than being a consequence of heteronormative pathologization or subjection, is a strategic deployment of coded femininity, aiming to subvert the normalized gender hierarchy between masculinity and femininity.¹⁹⁹ This confessional mode, *à la* Foucault, is the technology of the modern sexualized subject.²⁰⁰

¹⁹⁹ Song Lim, *Celluloid comrades representations of male homosexuality in contemporary Chinese cinemas*, 90–92.

²⁰⁰ Regarding confession as a practice of knowledge-power that generates the interior truth and feelings of a private modern sexualized subject, Foucault de-essentializes sexuality and thus reveals the power mechanism behind the historical making of modern normative sexuality. In *The History of Sexuality*, Foucault traces the modern institutions of sexual truth, e.g. the medical profession, to its medieval genealogy, that is, to the practice of confession, through which the religious concept of sin is replaced by

In *East Palace, West Palace*, we witness how this power operation is dramatized in Ah Lun's confessional process as it begins with the scene of police interpellation. Rather than visualizing how this power mechanism creates a pathological view of homosexuality as gender inversion, *East Palace, West Palace* eroticizes the politics of this confessional mode, subverting this regime of sexual truth by turning the tables on the apparatus, as represented by the policeman Xiao Shi.

If the policeman's ongoing interrogation seeks to secure the border between the homosocial and the homosexual by making Ah Lun confess that his homosexuality is a pathological over-identification with the feminine, Ah Lun's performative confession will eventually reveal the power mechanism behind this border policing, laying bare how femininity and masculinity are discursively constructed through patriarchal power. The key to this table turning lies in the transgressive desire within Ah Lun's confessional story, a perversion of the Oedipal law of desire that eventually will exceed the gazing control of the Other and subvert the Symbolic order of the state. To discuss how this transgressive desire works visually, we need to pay attention to how the gaze is constructed in a multilayered fashion. Since the 1970s, feminist film scholars and critics have tried to tackle the question of the gaze and its implications for the gendered subjectivity of the viewing public. Largely borrowing from Lacanian psychoanalysis, Laura Mulvey observes a patriarchal gazing logic in Hollywood cinema that aligns the

the modern notion of private sexual secret. In so doing, Foucault makes it explicit that sexual truth about individuals is nothing but a discursive effect of the power operations of the institutions of sexual knowledge. This is also a historical process in which we see the discursive change about sexuality from *arts erotica* to *scientia sexualis*. See Foucault, *The history of sexuality*, 53–73.

position of the camera with the gaze of the male protagonist within the diegesis, an alignment securing the agency of looking for the male subject and the subjection of being looked at for the female other.²⁰¹ By granting the audience scopophilic pleasure, classical Hollywood cinema reinstates the Oedipal scenario of the desiring male subject, reaffirming the phallogocentrism of the masculine position.²⁰² *East Palace, West Palace* is a queer film in the sense that its visual logic destabilizes the fetishistic logic of the gaze by Hollywood narrative conventions. Through an ongoing splitting between the position of the camera and the point of view shots, *East Palace, West Palace* creates a visual dizziness that brings the audience to a state of vertigo and of cognitive disturbance, in which the normalizing gazing position is cancelled out.

For example, the opening panning sequence already establishes the spectral position of the camera, a position that, on the one hand, assumes an omniscient view of things unfolding in the narrative; on the other, with some sideway angles and aerial shots capturing only partial amount of the scenes, the camera position also seems to acknowledge its inability to reveal the whole picture. This paradoxical viewing process is further rendered unsettled when the camera adopts an ongoing series of shifting alignments with Ah Lun and Xiao Shi. In the opening interrogation scene, the camera seems to align itself with the policeman's point of view, securing a gazing position that renders Ah Lun passive. Nevertheless, this secured alignment will soon be disrupted in

²⁰¹ Susan Hayward, "feminist film theory," in *Cinema studies the key concepts* (London; New York: Routledge, 2000), 141-148, <http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&scope=site&db=nlebk&db=nlabk&AN=61022>.

²⁰² Ibid., pp. 141-148.

the following sequence, when Xiao Shi seizes Ah Lun in a park after hours, in which we see Ah Lun fiercely looking back onto Xiao Shih, a point of view shot that unsettles the alignment between the camera position and Xiao Shi's previous point of view shot.

This disruptive shifting of the gaze frames how we view Ah Lun's narrative of his life story—a perverse life starting with the absence of the Father. Ah Lun tells us that his mother, as a seamstress earning her own living, had to balance between work and caring for him. Nevertheless, in order to discipline him, the mother would tell the young Ah Lun that if he did not behave, the police will come to claim him. The absence of the Father, in the mother's disciplinary technique, is replaced with the image of the powerful police, whose castrating authority, in Ah Lun's perversion of the Oedipal trajectory, becomes the fantasy or object of desire in his mind. Following this primal scene of desire, Ah Lun embarks on a chronological narrative of his identificatory trajectory, through which we discover that he first identifies himself with “public bus,” a prematurely sexy girl who was ostracized in high school for her overtly sexual traits. Nevertheless, this identification with the “public bus” leads Ah Lun to form a sexual relationship with her. Ah Lung's story is also punctuated with the ancient tale of a male executioner, who captivates a female slave to be his wife. In so doing, Ah Lun inscribes a meta-narrative to allegorically comment on his confessional story—a critical space that further theatricalizes the changing power dynamics between the listening police and the confessing Ah Lun.

The desire to know the truth of the subjugated confessional subject, *à la* Foucault,

constitutes the power-knowledge dynamic, which also produces the sexualized subject. While at the surface, it is the police who exercises power on Ah Lun to extort his shameful sexual secret, the desire to know will nevertheless eventually turn the tables on Xiao Shi himself; a perverse desire, rather than safely relegated to the pathological interiority of Ah Lun, is narratively constructed under the demand of the police in order to safeguard the sexual normativity within the law. In eroticizing this confessional mechanism, the perverse fantasy of Ah Lun will eventually unsettle this demarcating line, leading Xiao Shi to confront the fact that this perverse fantasy indeed belongs to himself, the representative of the interpellating apparatus.

This power reversal culminates in the final sado-masochist sequence. Starting with Ah Lun's confession of his final fulfillment of perverse fantasy, this sequence is also a sexualized deconstruction of the notion of romantic love. After finishing his disturbing narrative of how he becomes a homosexual, Ah Lun, now facing Xiao Shi with glow of satisfaction, tells Xiao Shi that his life will be complete when his dream policeman eventually comes into his life to capture him and then let him get away. By saying that his homosexual being can only be further completed after the policeman seeks to come back to him again, Ah Lun's perverse fantasy actually reveals the constitutive antagonism within a normalized heterosexual masculine subjectivity—the demonized/feminized homosexual other is an indispensable part in the making of this normative masculine subject. Ironically, in response to Ah Lun's perverse fantasy, Xiao Shi handcuffs Ah Lun and subjugates him to a seemingly debased position, demanding to “cure his problem.”

From this moment onwards, the table has been turned on Xiao Shi, for it is actually the masochist Ah Lun who hails Xiao Shi into his perverse fantasy. Xiao Shi is unconsciously stepping into the logic of sexualized power established by Ah Lun. Ah Lun starts to recount one of his sado-masochist sexual encounters, as enacted in a flashback sequence, which suddenly cuts back to the current moment when Xiao Shi starts to slap him as if he takes on the role of the sadist in the flashback sequence.

This process successfully brings Xiao Shi into the role of the sadist when Ah Lun invites him to unbutton his shirt to reveal the burnt scars on his chest. Encountering this scar, Xiao Shi is disturbed and starts to yell at Ah Lun, telling him that he is a despicable human being. Ah Lun retorts back by saying, “this is love. I am a homosexual. I love him.” With this performative utterance, Ah Lun perverts the sanctity of romantic love that is codified by the bourgeois patriarchal logic as the ultimate realization of human intimacy. By confronting Xiao Shi with the “scar” on his chest, Ah Lun forces the audience, through the point of view of Xiao Shi, to witness the wounding reality of heteronormative love; his perversion of the ultimate fulfillment of love subverts the sanctity of romantic love as a promise of achieving authentic selfhood. Rather, by eroticizing romantic love as a sado-masochist power game, he, similar to Jean Genet’s strategy of camp, inverts the normalizing law of desire, reconstructing the authentic self in “a perverse, parodic form and then perhaps denied again.”²⁰³ His parodic enactment of romantic love indeed unsettles Xiao Shi’s discursive power of sexual normativity.

²⁰³ Jonathan Dollimore, “Post/Modern: On The Gay Sensibility, or the Pervert’s Revenge on Authenticity,” in Fabio Cleto ed., *Camp: Queer Aesthetics and the Performing Subject*. Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1999, p. 227.

Announcing repetitively that “I will cure you,” Xiao Shi’s regulatory efforts only come to a point of self-doubt, when he demands Ah Lun to “reveal your true face” by asking him to don women’s clothes so that he can affirm his pathological gender inversion. By theatricalizing this demand, *East Palace, West Palace* reveals the “lack” in the patriarchal Symbolic—its management of masqueraded femininity as a way to overcome its own castration anxiety.²⁰⁴ Ah Lun’s parodic play of self-dehumanizing/feminizing becomes a threat to Xiao Shi’s masculine self-mastery, a threat revealing the constitutive lack of such an illusion of self-mastery.

This power reversal will be completed when Xiao Shi finally takes on the role of the sadist to rape the now feminized Ah Lun, completing the ritual of this sado-masochist power game. This reversal is the culmination of the oscillating visual perspective throughout the film, in which the gazer and the gazed upon are blurred in an ongoing power struggle, creating moments of disidentification,²⁰⁵ as the movie ends with Ah Lun’s point of view, seeing Xiao Shi disappearing into the horizon of the sunset. Thus the eroticization of power in Ah Lun and Xiao Shi’s confessional sado-masochist ritual is theatricalized to the extent of hyperbolic excess, such that the power dynamics between the gazer and the gazed is disrupted, unsettling the heteronormative discursive formation

²⁰⁴ For feminist theories of the male masquerade of femininity, see Susan Hayward, “female masquerade,” in *Cinema Studies: The Key Concepts*. London and New York: Routledge, 1996, pp. 132-134.

²⁰⁵ Jose Munoz revisits the question of desire and identification in the narrative of psychoanalysis, seeking to come up with a theory of disidentification to subvert Christian Metz’s and Laura Mulvey’s masculine gazing subject, a subject that is neatly aligned with the position of the camera informed by the Oedipal trajectory. See Jose Esteban Munoz, “Introduction: Performing Disidentification,” in *Disidentifications: queers of color and the performance of politics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), 13-34.

of pathological homosexuality.

How, then, do we read this eroticization of sexual politics transculturally, especially in the context of the post-Socialist recuperation of a male nationalist subject, as we've previously analyzed in Xie Jin's melodramas? That is, how does this queer deconstruction of the state power's discursive control over sexuality complicate the new definitions of "Chineseness" in the post-Socialist era?

Queer Critical Historical Consciousness

To delve into these issues, one should come back to the elements of "Chineseness" in *East Palace, West Palace*. While in the cinematic version, the elements of Chineseness are visually constructed through its reenactments of the ancient story from the *Kun* opera, the fictional version adopts the device of meta-narrative to complicate the notion of "history writing," especially in its relation to the construction of a national identity. In the fictional version, the story starts with Xiao Shi, who receives a package from Ah Lun. Upon opening the package, Xiao Shi sees only a booklet with the sentence "to my beloved" on the front, signed by Ah Lun. The third person narrative allows us to see Xiao Shi's reaction to this booklet. It tells us that Xiao Shi is strongly excited and tantalized by this booklet made by Ah Lun, so much so that he finds himself embarrassed and can only read it when he walks outside of the police station to an open place, away from the gaze of others. While Ah Lun himself is absent, Xiao Shi finds himself physically responding

to the booklet, with a sensation that he identifies as “love.”

This opening is significant for its twofold meaning. First, in comparison to the cinematic version, we might see how a disruption of the omnipresent gazing position and Xiao Shi’s point of view also occurs here. By aligning the readers with the gazing eyes of others, this narrative allows us to see Xiao Shi’s interior struggle, a psychological process leading us to the narrative of Ah Lun, as laid out in the booklet. In doing so, the meta-narrative of Ah Lun becomes an allegorical meta-commentary on the “love story” that is Xiao Shi and Ah Lun’s sado-masochist ritual. Unlike the cinematic version, the fictional version portrays the sado-masochist seduction between the two as a process driven by Xiao Shi’s dwelling on his “love relationship” with Ah Lun, his construction of romantic love to describe his eroticized game of power with Ah Lun the homosexual. In so doing, the device of meta-narrative reverses the power mechanism of Ah Lun’s confession. Rather than originating as a consequence of Xiao Shi’s power-driven interrogation, Ah Lun’s confession, in this narrative structure, is not a reflection of Ah Lun’s interior sexual reality; it is first and foremost a testimony to Xiao Shi’s desire, or his fantasy about himself. How can we further relate this reversal to the allegorical function of the meta-narrative—to Ah Lun’s booklet itself?

Before reading the booklet, Xiao Shi is excited by the thought that he will have another chance to relive the “romance” between him and Ah Lun. Nevertheless, once he opens the booklet, Xiao Shi is disappointed by the fact that what Ah Lun writes in the

booklet is nothing but a “historical fiction.”²⁰⁶ What does this historical fiction refer to? As the story unfolds, we will learn that the “historical fiction” here refers to the ancient story between the executioner and the female captive, as also depicted in the movie. However, what is worth our critical attention here is not the content of the story *per se*, but rather how this “historical fiction” and Ah Lun’s confessional story are narratively constructed in an allegorical relationship to each other. Instead of leading the readers directly into Ah Lun’s historical fiction, the narrative brings us to re-experience the eroticized sado-masochist game between Xiao Shi and Ah Lun. In the cinematic version, the gaze is disturbed by the unconventional visual style; in the fictional version, the anchoring of the perspective is also disrupted. When the narrative stops at the moment when Xiao Shi opens the booklet and gets disappointed by the historical fiction that is not related to himself, the narrative jumps to the starting point of their romance, a new story beginning with Ah Lun’s voice. Is this the voice heard from Xiao Shi’s memory? Or is this a voice directly from Ah Lun himself? The haziness of perspectives creates a liminal psychological space where Xiao Shi’s and Ah Lun’s fantasies are fused together. Interestingly, in the fictional version, the dimension of political allegory that is rendered implicit in the cinematic version is made explicit here. Ah Lun’s first utterance is a social commentary: “the deflated is socialism; the inflated is capitalism.” This social commentary provokes Xiao Shi, setting the stage for the sado-masochist game between the two. With Ah Lun’s escalatingly scathing social commentary, Xiao Shi is so

²⁰⁶ Xiaobo Wang, *Hei tie shi dai* (Shanghai: Shanghai san lian shu dian, 2008), 283.

provoked that he slaps Ah Lun's cheeks and demands him to not talk about it anymore. Instead, Xiao Shi rectifies Ah Lun's story by rendering this social commentary into a love story. He tells Ah Lun, "I am here not to remember bad things about you; I am here to explain how I fall in love with you and why I have to love you."²⁰⁷

What does love have to do with an eroticized power game between the two? Wang Xiaobo is apparently making a signature political statement here—his trademark style of trivializing the authoritarian top-down political control by way of sexualization. As my previous overview of the changing cultural forms during the socialist era shows, the Chinese socialist politicization of the romantic genre manages to transform the romantic feelings of love into a pedagogy of political passion over the years. This process culminates during the Cultural Revolution, when personal and individualized feelings/emotions are subsumed under collective political fanaticism. Starting his literary career in the late 1980s, when the liberalist concept of individual freedom starts to take hold in China, Wang's literary enterprise very much plays with this new paradigm to reconstruct the desexualized Cultural Revolutionary era by way of hypersexualizing the political. For example, in his canonized piece, *The Age of Gold*, a story depicting a college student's coming-of-age during the Down to the Countryside Movement, he turns the socialist party's political management of personal reporting into a voyeuristic game of sexual desire between the party and the individual. In order to highly manage the individual's mindset and thoughts, the Chinese socialist party-state, during this time period, implements a governing method of making "politically suspicious" individuals

²⁰⁷ Ibid., p. 286.

give written or oral reports to the authorities as a way to monitor potential subversion. This method of political control shares the technology of subject, as identified by Foucault in the confessional mode. While historically this socialist confessional mode of subject formation has been used to secure the political order, in Wang's literary reconstructions of that immediate historical past, he deploys seemingly trivializing sexual confessions to subvert such a technology of subjectivity.

Wang's use of hypersexuality is, as critic Ai Xiaoming observes, to de-sanctify the "desexualized revolutionary era of idealism," further revealing the "absurdity hidden under such a strong social force of the revolutionary era."²⁰⁸ Similarly, in *East Palace, West Palace*, the deployment of homosexuality here is not about the representation of homosexuality *per se*; it is rather to use homosexuality as a trope of eroticized power in order to deconstruct the transcendence of the political. But how is the use of homosexuality here different from those in reconstructions of the revolutionary era, given that the historical background of *East Palace, West Palace* is set in the post-Socialist era?

As Ah Lun's opening political remark suggests, the use of homosexuality here deals more with China's political identity during the post-Socialist era, when a capitalist market system is replacing or challenging the socialist orthodoxy of the past. This identity quest, as my previous discussions have shown, started in the 1980s, the first decade of the Post-Socialist era, during which we see the return of personalized feelings and emotions to counteract the collectivism of political passion. While Xie Jin's melodramas herald in

²⁰⁸ Ai Xiaoming, "ge ming shi qi de xing li fen xi," in Yuanhong Han, *Wang Xiaobo yan jiu zi liao* (Tianjin Shi: Tianjin ren min chu ban she, 2009), 426.

the return of Confucian moral sentimentalism as a way to restore a masculine Chinese national subject, Wang's *East Palace, West Palace*, I contend, is a radical deconstruction of such a recuperative attempt. The sentimental reparation in Xie's melodramas is done away with in the eroticization and politicization of romantic love in *East Palace, West Palace*; its bleak view of the promise of self-fulfillment through the concept of liberalist romantic love frustrates the liberalist embrace of individual freedom as a way out of the socialist impasse. Contrary to the general reception of Wang as a quintessential liberalist thinker/writer, Wang, as his *East Palace, West Palace* demonstrates, is a complicated thinker who pushes our cognitive boundaries to re-think the existential borderlines between absolute selfhood and social collectivity. To situate his paradoxical view of the individual versus the collective in the historical condition of Post-Socialist China, we might say that, to return to Chris Berry's observation, Wang's avant-garde aesthetics do not seek to resolve this social contradiction through sentimentalizing this unresolved loss or antagonism; rather, his aesthetics relentlessly reveal such a social contradiction to foster more critical thoughts about the dialectic between the individual and the collective, state control and citizen sovereignty, and all kinds of social dichotomies that are created through a self/other divide in an increasingly atomized society of individualist desires.

The staging of homosexuality here is hence a campy play on the psychoanalytic narrative of homosexuality as perversion or inversion of normative gender. It is a conscious deployment of a "strategy of deviance" to subvert the pathologizing logic of an emerging heteronormative logic of masculine nationalism, by way of sexualizing the

homosocial.²⁰⁹ The meta-narrative in the fictional version further lays bare such an allegorical intention. By creating an intertextual reference between the sado-masochist game and Ah Lun's historical fiction of a romance between an ancient executioner and his female captive, Wang seems to suggest that the power to narrate history, as an extension of the confessional mode of self-narration, has become, in the post-Socialist era, a struggle between the nation state and the individuals. If all kinds of recuperative attempts to re-narrativize history serve the purpose of reconstituting a national subject to re-emerge as a neoliberalist cosmopolitan citizen, Wang's eroticization of the power struggle between grand narrative and personal confession inscribes a dissenting voice in this collective cultural recuperative attempt, leaving all kinds of historical narrative open for a possible ongoing struggle between the individual and the collective. In so doing, Wang's queer art is an attempt to subsume all normative discursive attempts to rebuild Chineseness in this Post-Socialist era, as the fiction also ends with the moment of power reversal: "Xiao Shi locks Ah Lun's booklet in the drawer. He walks out and stops at the entrance of the park. He does not want to go home but he has nowhere else to go if not going home. The darkness of the night befalls on him. The despair that used to shroud Ah Lun now also covers him."²¹⁰ If Xiao Shi represents the apparatus of the state power, the eroticized power game between him and Ah Lun in the end subverts such a power dynamic by rendering this representative of state sovereignty homeless, in a state of desperation that unhinges the dichotomized power dynamics between the normativity of

²⁰⁹ See Earl Jackson, *Strategies of deviance: studies in gay male representation* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995).

²¹⁰ Wang, *Hei tie shi dai*, 310.

the new political order and its putatively excluded others.

Queerness in *East Place, West Palace*, in Ban Wang's terms, produces a space of critical historical consciousness that "does not hasten to heal the wounds or prescribes a quick therapy."²¹¹ Nevertheless, it does not dwell on the wound for sentimental and resentful purposes; it plays, eroticizes, and theatricalizes the wound in order to come to terms with the inevitability of historical violence for the purpose of going beyond a reparative attempt, seeking ongoing transformations of the wounds for Post-Socialist subjects' entry into global modernity.

Another theme rises with this dichotomy between an emerging liberalist individual and a perceived collectivism of the socialist past—the dialectics between individual authenticity and theatricalized external expressions. This dialectic, as Haiyan Lee points out, is an important indicator for us to understand how the socialist grammar of intimacy recodifies affective structures, which in Chris Berry's analysis of *East Palace, West Palace* becomes an important clue to understand its aesthetic significance. That is, if, according to Lee, the socialist grammar of feelings relies on the theatricality of politicized emotive expressions, then how do we understand the highly theatricalized sado-masochism in *East Palace, West Palace*, given that this text is definitely not an officially produced socialist text? This question further leads me to discuss the emergence of queer theatre in post-Socialist China, in which we see the question of theatricality foregrounded in its attempts to understand what the humanities, especially the Chinese

²¹¹ Wang, *Illuminations from the past*, 162.

humanities, means in the post-Socialist condition. Before I start to talk about the theatrical version of *East Palace, West Palace* and Lin Ying-yu's adaptation of Jean Genet's *The Maids*, I find it useful to provide a quick overview of how the theatrical scene has changed since the 1980s, through which I will place the historical significance of the emergence of queer theatre.

Absurd (Chinese) Humanities in Post-Socialist Chinese Theatres

Similar to the literary and cinematic scenes, the theatrical scene in Post-Socialist China also faces a central agenda of redefining the Chinese humanities in relation to the changing political climate. Ever since the fall of the Gang of Four, all kinds of theatrical performances, ranging from romantic comedies to historical plays, began to emerge, creating a sudden outburst of diverse genres. In the 1980s, aesthetic references to Western avant-garde theatres became an important inspiration for new theatres for exploring the meanings of how to be Chinese during the Post-Socialist era. Naming the experimental theatres emerging from this period "Exploration Theatre," Sherwood Hu Xueha concludes: "Exploration Theatre has its own features and social context. Yet, it is also reminiscent of Theatricalism in Russia and Europe early in the twentieth century, when Meyerhold, Max Reinhardt, Gordon Craig, and other theatre artists challenged realism and brought theatre into a new realm."²¹² What Hu refers to here is a historical debate on

²¹² Xuehua Sherwood Hu, *Exploration theatre in Chinese huaju of the 1980s*, 2000, 11.

the relevance of socialist realism in representing contemporary social reality in this new era; this debate, according to Hu, is bifurcated into two camps—the older generations, who believes in the necessity of social realism, and the younger generations, who seek to explore the formal aspects of the medium of theatre.²¹³ This aesthetic debate within the theatre community actually touches upon the changing dialectic between authenticity and theatricality in the understanding of subject formation in the Post-Socialist era. If socialist realism during the revolutionary era regulates how socialist Chinese humanities must be codified on stage, the eruption of various artistic impulses for the purpose of experimenting with the theatrical forms, beyond the collective desire for stylistic reformations, indeed indexes a felt insufficiency to understand the humanities within such a delimiting framework. The experimental theatre groups' foregrounding of the formal aspects directly touches upon the larger ontological unsettlements during this time period. By playing with the medium itself, they seek to understand how a new Chinese subject can, and should be, represented by a dialectical process between authenticity and theatricality. Therefore, the ascendancy of Theatricalism in the Exploration Theatre of the 1980s does not simply define its aesthetic feature; the prominence of Theatricalism is symptomatic of the uncertainty about human reality in this time period.

Among the various translations of Western avant-grade theatre aesthetics, the aesthetics of the theatre of the absurd plays a leading role in this wave of reform. Unlike their Western counterparts, who were concerned with deconstructing the faith in modern rational selfhood, the emerging theatres of the absurd in post-Socialist China directed

²¹³ Ibid., pp. 45-56.

their aesthetic concerns toward the unmaking of the Chinese socialist subject and, consequently, the remaking of a new Chinese subject that must be in touch with the essence of humanity again. But what is this essence of humanity? Rather than seeking to find out how this human essence is reconstructed during this time period, I understand “the human essence,” which these theatres attempt to reconstruct, as a discursive site, where all kinds of new Chinese humanity is imagined and proposed to re-orient the audience. The audience is further encouraged to walk away from the immediate, traumatic ruins of the revolutionary era and to instead head into the coming era of global capitalism. While previous theatre scholarship has identified some representative texts to analyze how some defining issues (e.g. the romanticized individual; love; ethics; social responsibility; historical memory; and national identity) are dealt with in these theatrical texts in order to foster new images of the Chinese subject,²¹⁴ I intend to situate my discussions of the emergence of queer theatre in Post-Socialist China in this historical context. That is, in regarding queer theatre as part and parcel of the rise of Theatricalism in the Post-Socialist Chinese theatrical scene, we might ask how we make sense of its aesthetic and political significance.

My previous discussion of *East Palace, West Palace* has established that understanding of queerness, as visually constructed in the sado-masochist power reversal game, cannot be completed if we do not consider the style of theatricalization in such a construction. Queerness in *East Palace, West Palace*, is therefore inseparable from the

²¹⁴ See Hu, Exploration theatre in Chinese huaju of the 1980s. Haiping Yan, *Theater and society: an anthology of contemporary Chinese drama* (Armonk, N.Y.: M.E. Sharpe, 1998).

theatricality in the text. This aesthetic dimension is further foregrounded in the theatrical version of *East Palace, West Palace*.

Theatricalizing Queerness; Queering Theatricality

In the theatrical version, the power-knowledge operation in the confessional mode provokes the audience's consciousness of how this process is theatrically constructed. By making Ah Lun recount his fantasy directly to the audience, with Xiao Shi monitoring the process backstage, the theatrical version deploys the specificity of the medium of theatre itself; that is, it invites the audience to reflect upon the theatrical nature of how sexualized subjectivity is constructed in this confessional process.

Ah Lun's address to the listening public, far from being a realistic method of recounting private fantasy, dances around two modes of addresses—the intimate confessional and the distanced narrative. In so doing, a critical space is opened up between the actor Ah Lun and the character Ah Lun. Constantly shifting between these two subject positions, the identity of "Ah Lun" is constantly deconstructed and reconstructed so rapidly that our image of him is blurred. For example, in his opening speech, Ah Lun tells the audience the following: "Ah Lun is a homosexual. Friends of this kind do not just talk; they also do something more than talking—I don't think we have to be explicit about what they do. I am very familiar with Ah Lun...(he hesitates and then makes up his mind) I am also a homosexual and I come to the park a lot. Everyone

comes here. People talk here and sometimes do something more than talking.”²¹⁵

Similarly, Xiao Shi also oscillates between the actor and the character, constantly stepping in and out of the role to interact with Ah Lun, be it the actor or the character. Their narration sometimes gets reenacted in a process of conscious restoration of behavior,²¹⁶ through which the codification process of gendered behavior is purposefully repeated and therefore its mechanism is made explicit to the audience. The actors’ comments on some of the restored behaviors further generate moments of critical reflections on the normative social meanings attached to these behaviors. For example, in a scene when Xiao Shi demands Ah Lun to perform his “pathology,” the actor Ah Lun makes efforts to “perform” what Xiao Shi might perceive to be the pathology of homosexuality. After repeatedly trying, Ah Lun becomes tired and confused, resisting by saying, “I really do not know how to go about this.”²¹⁷ This moment of talking back is a staged failure of the reiterability of gender performativity, a resignification that consciously performs the absurd theatricality of normative gender codification.

This conscious blurring between the actors and the characters is further complicated by the story between the executioner and the female captive, which in the theatrical version becomes a meta-device of a play within a play. This play within a play, in the first part of the performance, is a story narrated through Ah Lun’s voice during the

²¹⁵ Wang Xiaobo, *East Palace, West Palace, a Play in Hei Tie Shi Dai*. Shanghai: Shanghai san lian shu dian, 2008, p. 345.

²¹⁶ Here I borrow Richard Schechner’s concept of “restoration of behavior.” He uses it to address the ritualistic aspects of social patterns, patterns that define social relationships and cultural norms. See Richard Schechner and Victor W Turner, *Between theater & anthropology* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1985).

²¹⁷ Wang Xiaobo, “East Palace, West Palace, a Play” in *Hei Tie Shi Dai*. Shanghai: Shanghai san lian shu dian, 2008, p. 349.

darkness of intermissions. This meta-narrative eventually becomes performative towards the end of the play, when Xiao Shi forces Ah Lun to put on women's garments in order to subjugate him into a feminine position. It is through the explicit deployment of the theatricality of this subjugating technology that the power reversal process on the stage is achieved. At this moment, the function of the meta-narrative of the executioner and female captive is rendered visible. If the objective voice of narrative provides a critical space for the audience to draw an analogical relation between this "historical story" and the story between Ah Lun and Xiao Shi, then Ah Lun's final enactment of feminization collapses the two, generating a vertiginous dizziness that disrupts the multiple layers of reality on the stage. This performative disruption further complicates the notion of theatricality, especially in terms of how power is theatrically revealed. By deliberately invoking the theatricality of the gendered power mechanism, the staginess of the sado-masochist game designed by Ah Lun is achieved here, thus a strategic redeployment of Xiao Shi's disciplinary power for the purpose of subversion. This theatricalized power game starts with Ah Lun's talking back, a questioning retort of love that unsettles the disciplinary power of Xiao Shi: "If you don't love me, why would you let me go last time? If you don't love me, why would you beat me, shame me and scold me? Do you actually hate me? If not, why don't you come to love me?"²¹⁸ After this question, Xiao Shi becomes shaken, and blushes. This question reverses the power game, provoking the homosexual desire within Xiao Shi's putatively heterosexual subject position. Revealing homosexual inclinations, Xiao Shi is astonished by his own change and attempts to retain

²¹⁸ Ibid., p. 373.

his identity by subjugating Ah Lun into a feminine position. It is in the process of playing along with Xiao Shi's desire to feminize him as a gendered woman that Ah Lun starts to narrate the story of the female captive. In so doing, Ah Lun gains discursive control over this process. That is, at the surface, it is Xiao Shi who operates his heteronormative disciplinary power to feminize Ah Lun; nevertheless, Ah Lun's masochistic control of the game actually subverts the meaning of this gendering process. Ah Lun seems to suggest, through his allusion to the story, that his own process of feminization is a process of gaining power and pleasure through masochistic control of the master: "In Ah Lun's story, this female captive starts to have her life around the pillar to which she is tied. She waits for the executioner to come home in daytime. When he is not home, she paints her eyebrows and stylizes herself meticulously, waiting to be possessed. How pleasurable it is!"²¹⁹

This power reversal achieves its pinnacle at the end of the play, when Ah Lun simulates sex with Xiao Shi as he finishes the story of the female captive. After the sexual act, Ah Lun walks up to the front of the stage, addressing the audience with the following: "I masquerade as a woman in this story. This is indeed not what I intended in the first place. But if that's what he wants me to do, I am more than willing to comply with his desire. Even though I lost my gender, (laughing) well...women are not really like what I am. Does it really matter if one is born a man or a woman?"²²⁰ This final speech makes the purpose of the power reversal explicit. As John K. Noyes explicates,

²¹⁹ Ibid., 373.

²²⁰ Ibid., 375.

sadomasochism “produces subjectivity through the performance of a sexual technology. It relies upon the pleasurable disappearance—and controlled reappearance—of the subject.”²²¹ Here, Ah Lun’s speech lays bare the intended power reversal of the disciplinary power of heteronormative policing by performing the process of subjugated subject formation. This power reversal further takes the dimension of reversing the gaze of the audience when Ah Lun slowly walks into the audience, leaving the trail of his ghostly voice and saying “maybe you used to desire for possessing something, possessing your beauty, possessing others. But these are all illusions. Born in the world, except for waiting to be possessed, what else can you wait for? So, go love him, obey him, and tell him everything about you.”²²² By aligning the audience with his vanishing point, Ah Lun’s meta-theatricality reverses the relation between the gazer and the gazed, making the audience witness the sado-masochist unveiling of the social disciplinary technology of subjectivity, whereby one’s becoming oneself is always caught up in a process of being subjugated into a larger symbolic network. While Ah Lun eventually disappears into darkness, a spotlight lingers on Xiao Shi, who now tries to look prideful, with Ah Lun’s trailing ghostly voice asking the audience to “love him.” The final scene seems to reverse the logic of the gaze by leaving Xiao Shi on stage as an object of desire for the audience, who is now aligned with Ah Lun, to be gazed at. This reversal of gazing position changes the economy of libidinal flow, rendering the representative of the

²²¹ John K Noyes, *The mastery of submission: inventions of masochism* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1997), 4.

²²² Wang Xiaobo, “East Palace, West Palace, a Play” in *Hei Tie Shi Dai*. Shanghai: Shanghai san lian shu dian, 2008, p. 375.

Symbolic, Xiao Shi, a fetishistic site of cathexis.

The theatrical version of *East Palace, West Palace* queers theatricality in order to produce a dissenting voice against the heteronormative demand of the state apparatus. If how the sado-masochist theatricalization of queerness dialogues with the question of normative Chineseness is not clear in the theatrical version, then Lin Ying-yu's adaptation of Jean Genet's *The Maids* tackles this question head-on. That is, in adapting Jean Genet's canonical queer text *The Maids*, Lin's primary purpose is to prove that contemporary Chinese culture is attuned to the absurdist aesthetics of the Western avant-garde canon; such an attempt speaks to contemporary China's aspiration for a cosmopolitan definition of humanity.

Intercultural Jean Genet: *The Maids* in China

The adaptation of Jean Genet's *The Maids* by Lin Ying-yu could be considered a continuation of the Exploration Theatre's experiments with the meanings of the humanities in the 1980s. If, since the advent of the Exploration Theatre in the 1980s, the "theatre of the absurd"—among other introduced forms of Western avant-garde theatres—has become the buzz word for theatre practitioners to find new modes of staging the new forms of Chinese humanities in the post-Socialist era, then this buzz word, rather than being limited to a strictly defined aesthetics, has been appropriated by various practitioners to envision their understanding of "modern" theatrical aesthetics. It

is after the pursuit of the imaginary of the modern associated with the theatre of the absurd that Lin decides to venture into an adaptation of Jean Genet's *The Maids*. Lin explicitly states that the mission of this production is an attempt to prove how a contemporary Chinese theatre director is also capable of staging a play that is cosmopolitan and modern.

In 1986 when I was sent out by the state to pursue further studies in Russia, I was asked a question by a theatre director, "Can you Chinese stage a Shakespearean play?"...Facing these prideful interrogations, I was shocked and angered and further fostered my strong sense of nationalistic pride. In 1990s, under the support of the leaders at Central Academy of Dramatic Arts, I am the first one among the director teachers to successfully stage plays from the theatre of the absurd. When I devoted myself to these endeavors, I was very much motivated by the nationalistic sentiments provoked from my early encounters with the humiliating questions. This time when I staged *The Maids*, these feelings still very much motivate me.²²³

In light of the above information, we could say that queerness in Genet's theatricalized absurd human condition also indexes a dimension of "Chineseness" in Lin's transcultural localization. It is in her transcultural appropriation of Jean Genet's theatrical aesthetics that she intends to make sense of how contemporary Chinese identity can be relevant to a theatrical form that is considered globally avant-garde. Therefore, my discussion of queerness in Lin's adaptation is inherently connected with her attempts to represent Chineseness on the stage. Her staging of queerness entails, if not an overarching intension,

²²³Lin Ying-yu, "Staging 'the Absurd'; Understanding the Absurd: a Conclusion of *The Maids*," in

an artistic desire to understand how contemporary Chinese identity could be in line with this Western theatre of the absurd.

To situate Lin's localization of Genet's queer theatre in the context of post-Socialist China, how do we understand the relations between Chineseness and queerness in her transcultural theatrical attempts? To further explicate this, I will turn to Helen Gilbert and Jacqueline Lo's study of cross-cultural theatre. They revisit the existing paradigms of cross-cultural theatre practices and foreground the questions of cultural identities, especially how identity-making is caught up in the power dynamics between the source culture and the target culture. Upholding the inseparability between artistic endeavors and the sociopolitical contexts in which these endeavors take place, Gilbert and Lo's model of intercultural theatre "rests on a notion of differentiated hybridity that works in multiple and sometimes opposing ways."²²⁴ What they mean by differentiated hybridity is a concept borrowed from Robert Young, who distinguishes his idea of hybridity into "organic hybridity" and "intentional hybridity." For the former, it embraces a cultural model of fusion that resists differentiating between cultural differences; for the latter, it is a conscious deployment of cultural differences to strengthen cultural agency's resistance towards dilution and co-option.

Lin's mission statement seems to be along the lines of the latter mode, that of intentional hybridity, a conscious use of Genet's avant-garde aesthetics to reinstate a positive form of contemporary Chineseness. Nevertheless, with further analysis of how

²²⁴Jacqueline Lo and Helen Gilbert. "Toward a Topography of Cross-Cultural Theatre Praxis." *Tdr / the Drama Review*. 46.3 (2002): 31-53, p. 45.

she engages in this cross-cultural translation, we will find that the Chineseness constructed here, rather than being a positivist reinstatement of an essentialized notion, is indeed an elusive picture in an ongoing process of changing. That is, Lin's transcultural appropriation produces a similar effect to Genet's anti-essentialist aesthetics of the humanistic subject. To understand how this transcultural translation of queerness is achieved, let me begin with the significant difference between Lin and Jean Genet.

The most significant difference between the two lies in Lin's adding of a third dimension to the already complicated layers of meta-theatres in Genet—her deployment of an acting troupe. Before the performance proceeds to Solange and Claire's play-within-a-play, Lin's adaptation starts with another meta-theatrical scene—a stagehand coming on stage to arrange the props. With the actors posing as the mannequins, the beginning offers a deliberate meta-theatrical device to trouble the line between the animate and the inanimate, a line also demarcating the boundary between the actor and the enacted. For it is with the dialectical process between these supposedly established dichotomies that Genet's plays push our cognitive limits to consider the question of subjective agency. Therefore, the added meta-theatrical dimension in the beginning can be regarded as an attempt to think about the cultural agency of contemporary China in appropriating a canonical play from the repertory of Western avant-garde theatre. The prop-arranging scene will soon evolve into an opening scene, in which the actors emerge from the inanimate state of the mannequins and become the actors of China National Youth Theatre, the actual theatre troupe that stages this play.

The reference to real life is rendered obvious here. In making the actors play themselves--actors who are about to present Jean Genet's *The Maids* to the audience--, Lin creates a self-referential moment through this added meta-theatrical device, which invites the audience to critically engage in the sociopolitical and aesthetic meanings of her theatre troupe's attempts to stage this play in this particular historical moment of post-Socialist China. Before they start acting, the noise of modern industrial life awakens them from their inanimate states, stimulating them to engage in an ecstatic group dance. After this festive transition, the actors address the audience by announcing their identities as a group of artists, actors and players. Stating that "everyone is acting a role," the actors call attention to this meta-theatrical device that makes explicit the central theme in *The Maids*—the constructedness of social identity and its relational power dynamics.

But how do we read the constructedness of Chinese identity here in relation to this added meta-theatrical moment? I suggest that the meta-theatrical space added here is continued with the deployment of narrators in Lin's adaptation—a feature that is not in Genet's original play. The use of narrators creates another layer of critical space that is continued from the opening moment, allowing the Chinese audience to further ponder the meaning of this production within even the play itself. We might think of this conscious deployment as characteristic of what Young defines as "intentional hybridity," a cross-cultural interplay that intends to sustain the target culture's agency and resistance. In carving out such a reflective space within the play, Lin seems to keep the audience alert to the theatricality of this enactment. This intentional alertness is further heightened

when the acting constantly shifts between the narrators and the actors, a shifting that creates an effect of dissonance and de-synchronization between the actors and the roles they enact. For example, in Genet's original play, when the maids start to engage in their daily role play game in which Claire enacts the role of the lady and Solange enacts the role of Claire, their role play is done in such a realistic fashion that the audience's awareness of the process of enactment comes as a surprise when the maid's fantasy act gets interrupted by a phone call. In Lin's adaptation, the nature of enactment is already revealed to the audience when two narrators get on top of a walkway of the stage to ventriloquize the maids' lines. This ventriloquization, nevertheless, does not create a seamless correspondence between the narrators and the maids, because sometimes the actors speak for themselves. This shifting furthermore creates moments of tension between the narrators and the actors, disrupting smooth correspondence between the two. Such a disruption adds another layer to the theme of life-as-acting in Genet's play. If we look at this addition of narrators as Lin's critical space for the Chinese audience to think about what it means for a Chinese director to stage Genet's play, then the tension between the narrators and the actors can be seen as an intentional strategy to embed a critical moment of cultural tension that keeps this process of attempted fusion disruptive. That is, if the narrators represent the director's auteurial intention to make sense of the maids' fantasy act, then the tension between the two, aside from unsettling the audience's voyeuristic pleasure of gazing upon their fantasy play, is highlighted to suggest the director's acknowledgement of her inadequacy to authentically represent Genet's original

meanings. However, we should look at this inability as a productive disruption, rather than as a failure. As the concept of “intentional hybridity” implies, the purpose of this intended moment of awkwardness is to enact a critical moment of transculturation when the author’s interpretation and Genet’s text collide, producing an uneasy process of plot movement. This moment of collision interestingly corresponds to the “failure” of enactment in Genet’s original play. If, in the original play, the maids can only succeed in murdering their lady through enacting the role of the lady themselves, the seemingly tragic failure of the maids’ rebellion against their master echoes Lin’s acknowledged “failure” to faithfully tackle Genet’s play. Therefore, in order to know how Lin considers the “Chineseness” behind this attempt, so as to find relevance for cosmopolitan citizenship, one has to think about this in relation to the tragedy of the maids. That is, how does Lin’s critical interpretation of the maids’ tragic “failure” to escape from their marginalized existential conditions inform our understanding of Lin’s attempt to reinterpret “Chineseness” in a post-Socialist historical condition, particularly when China needs to reposition itself to get connected with the new global neoliberalism?

If the maids’ role play game is a failed attempt to wage a revolution against their bourgeois dominators, then we must ask how this failed revolution is relevant to a post-Socialist China when the legacy of leftist revolution is reevaluated. Lin specifically points out that it would be a mistake to read this play as a provocation of revolutions, for the maids’ role play, not a schemed revolt, is indeed a “masquerade of humanity.”²²⁵ This masquerade is a deconstruction of the essentialist view of the making of human

²²⁵ Personal communication, 2012 March, 3rd, in Beijing.

subjectivity; it is a theatrical thesis to showcase how subject positions are relatively created with the social mechanisms of desires. Alluding to Genet's fiction *The Diary of a Thief*, Lin sets up a glass box on stage to create the effect of "the hall of mirrors," a trope for the imaginary nature of human perceptions of the self that derives from this fiction. She makes the maids engage in their role playing inside this glass box. And when role playing is disrupted, she makes them run in and out of the doors of the glass box, creating a visual maze of reflections to further complicate the theme of "acting" and reality in the already complicated, multilayered meta-theatrical devices. Life becomes an endless extension of reflections; the reality of life is rendered into a layering of illusions.

This layering of illusions, in Lin's view, is not a fatalistic succumbing to the harsh reality of life. It is a heroization of those who are marginalized and relegated to the bottom of society. For Lin, this reversal must be further completed by having the maids be played by muscular male actors, a cross-dressing strategy that turns the normalizing gender power dynamics upside down. If, in a patriarchal society, women are assigned to the subjugated feminine position under the dominance of men, then it is even more disgraceful for biological males to take on feminine positions. In mainstream social attitudes, those effeminate men are even more despicable and debased than "real" women. In so doing, Lin follows Genet to create another layer of power reversal with a queering of gender. If the power of the lady is hinged upon the invisible male master of the house, then by visualizing the maids with hypermasculine bodies, Lin challenges the audience's preconceived notions of gendered power. How will we reconsider the knowledge-power

that determines a gendered and sexualized hierarchy if the masculine body, a corporeal site to which we traditionally assign power, is now aligned with the debased social roles? If the uneasiness between the male bodies and their feminine roles further allows us to see the process of how socialized bodily codes are inscribed on the body, then how will this discrepancy add to the meta-theatrical devices?

In Genet's original play, the maids' role play ends with a seemingly tragic heroic moment when the lady is successfully killed, though only in their enacted fantasy. In their fantasy world, the lady is terminated, along with Claire's enacted role of the lady. However, in real life, it is Solange who poisons Claire to death. The tragic feeling of the play, in Leo Bersani's interpretation, complicates a reading of performative parody, for the death of Claire/Madame constitutes a traumatic site of the real that resists any reiterative resignification. Leo Bersani considers Genet's gesture as a denial of the essence of subjects, a radical denial that locates beings on a plane of relational existence. He further elaborates on his reading of the transformative possibility at the end of *The Maids*,

Because no one will know that Solange is harboring Claire within her, or that Claire was addressing Solange as Claire when she asked for the poisoned tea, or that as Claire was impersonating Madame when she drank it, we could also say: it doesn't matter, since nothing has changed in the world. But nothing can change in this world—or rather (and this, it must be acknowledged, is an uncertain bet), between oppression now and freedom later there may have to be a radical break with the social self. What could be stranger? In this play, which, Genet insists, must not be taken realistically and which, within its unreality,

does distinguish between the maids' ceremony and their real lives, it is unreal within the unreal that carries the heaviest social and political burden. The maids' revolt (and the revolt of all the oppressed) will be effective only if their subjectivity can no longer be related to as an oppressed subjectivity. Madame may attend Solange's trial, but she has nonetheless been killed as that difference from the maids that constituted them as maids. Once more, it is perhaps Genet's homosexuality that allowed him to imagine a curative collapsing of social difference into a radical homo-ness, where the subject might begin again, differentiating itself from itself and thereby reconstituting sociality.²²⁶

Bersani sees transformative possibilities in Genet's queer attempt to reconstitute sociality in moments of collapsing social difference. Such a queer attempt to reform sociality is also picked up by Lin. In Lin's adaptation, this possibility is embodied by the narrators, whom she names as the unidentifiable. It is through the interventions with the unidentifiable that Lin defines her reinterpretation of Genet's text. With the unidentifiable narrators, Lin hopes to instill Chinese tradition in Genet's text. She explains,

I want to dissociate the bodily movements and speech between the maids and their master. Solange and Claire will execute the bodily movements; the speech will be delivered by the unidentifiable actors; the daily complaints between the two maids will be said by themselves. This is a method of postmodernist deconstruction; it is also a return to our tradition—our tradition is realism; this realism can be traced back to ancient shadow or puppet plays. In those forms, aren't the bodily movements and speeches separated?²²⁷

²²⁶Leo Bersani, *Homos*. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1995, p. 176-177.

²²⁷ Director's notes, p. 48 (translation mine).

No matter how she correctly traces this genealogy, what interests me in her statement here is her connection of the postmodern mode of deconstruction with a return to a Chinese tradition. Her deployment of the unidentifiable actors, in this sense, is an attempt to bridge the perceived gap between a cosmopolitan aesthetics and a Chinese tradition. If this tension is also part of the social antagonism that emerged in the post-Socialist era, as identified by Chris Berry, then Lin attempts to resolve this tension through the figures of the unidentifiable, which, as a theatrical device, leave an open-ended solution to this dilemma of Chinese identity in a time when the old and the new are constantly negotiating with each other for an uncertain future. Genet's homosexual attempt to reconstitute sociality is therefore transculturally localized in Lin's adaptation in order to address another issue—China's uncertain cultural or national identity in the new era. The unidentifiable becomes the meta-position of articulation in this endless layering of play within a play. It is nevertheless not a reified subject position of speech; it is, first and foremost, a liminal unidentifiable site of articulation, where all kinds of new possibilities of sociality can be imagined.

If the post-Socialist era witnesses the return of Confucian familial sentimentalism, an affective structure that heralds back the spectre of the Father, then queer expressions, as the examples of *East Palace*, *West Palace* and Lin's adaptation of *The Maids* suggest, linger on the figures of the marginalized and oppressed. This lingering, however, does not suggest a nostalgic return to the leftist past or a fetishized picture of pre-modern China; rather, this lingering is an aesthetic strategy to evoke

critical historical consciousness about the past, as in *East Palace, West Palace*, or a critical understanding about the future, as in Lin's *The Maids*. Queer reflections on the past and future of the Chinese people do not intend a recuperative transcendence of trauma for a triumphant embrace of a future Chinese subject—as the neoliberalist production of desiring subjects indexes—that could be cosmopolitan and Chinese at the same time. Instead, queerness in post-Socialist China constitutes dissonances and dissension. They are ongoing modes of affective forces that exceed normativity.

CHAPTER 4

QUEER MELODRAMA IN THE AGE OF NEOLIBERALISM: THE TASK OF HOMECOMING IN MICKEY CHEN'S AND CUI ZI'EN'S WORKS

This chapter discusses the trope of home in two self-identified queer activists/independent filmmakers' works—Mickey Chen from Taiwan and Cui Zi'en from Mainland China. I situate their works alongside the corpus of Chinese queer cinema that has emerged since the 1990s, and I analyze how queer desires in this set of works are affects produced as a result of the deterritorialization and reterritorialization of the nuclear family in the age of global neoliberalism. I look at the respective melodramatic and transcendental moments in Chen's and Cui's works as affects that transform conventional values that are associated with the liberalist nuclear family, indexing new possibilities of familial belonging.

As I've discussed previously, *Crystal Boys* sets the stage for Sinophone queerness to emerge. Hans Huang analyzes the guilt-ridden depictions of sexual shame that are prevalent in the fiction as part of "the politics of reticence," that is, as an aesthetic reflection of the sexual morality of the sage-king position in Confucian moral sentimentalism.²²⁸ The unspeakable pain of deviant sexual desire becomes a rallying point allowing readers to identify the "evil sons" as sympathetic characters, who, though

²²⁸ Huang regards the dark depictions of sexual shame in the text as effects of the discursive formation of sexual modernity in Taiwan's developmentalist ideology. He further attributes this motif to the Confucian sage-king moral system, an ethico-political order that forbids public discussions about sexuality as a way to manage normative sexuality. He demonstrates a convincing contextual analysis by linking the depictions of sexual shame with the public policies on sexual management since the 1960s in Taiwan. See Huang, *Queer politics and sexual modernity in Taiwan*, 120–131.

tentatively wandering away from the normative space of home, will eventually be redirected to a path of homecoming, as the TV adaptation and its reception in 2003 emphasize.²²⁹ Mapping the textual migration of *Crystal Boys* from its fictional to its cinematic and televisual versions, we will observe an increasing impulse toward the idea of homecoming as the story travels to a more popular medium. While the popularity of a specific medium such as television, might explain the increasingly normative impulse in the adaptation, we cannot easily bypass the changing historical conditions of textual production and reception. New queer fictions and cinema in Taiwan have emerged since the mid 1990s, along with the queer rights movement. With camp and gender performativity as their aesthetic agenda, new queer cultural expressions, contrary to the bleak depictions of sexual shame in the fictional version of *Crystal Boys*, embrace sexual diversity and celebrate sexual perversity as ways in which to proliferate the modalities of sexuality.²³⁰ While these self-consciously queer expressions continue to complicate normative meanings of intimacy, a discourse of normative homosexuality²³¹ is also rising, advocating for mainstream society's acknowledgement of the sexual citizenships of queer

²²⁹ Hans Huang further reveals how this politics of sexual shame has allowed bourgeois *tongzhi* subjects to emerge into middle class respectability since the late 1990s. The appearance of the televisual version of *Crystal Boys* signifies such a "return" to domestic normativity. Hans Huang, pp. 132-134, p. 140.

²³⁰ The corpus of new queer fictions in Taiwan, including, but not limited to, the works by Ta-Wei Chi, Hong Ling, and Chen Xue, unabashedly indulges in the ecstasy of sexual perversion as a way to experiment with their forms of narration. With regard to queer cinema, except for the works by auteur Tsai Ming Ling, most Taiwanese queer cinema, following Ang Lee's *The Wedding Banquet*, adopts mainstream narrative styles that are permeated with sentimentalism.

²³¹ Here I am referring to Lisa Duggan's concept of "homonormativity," by which she refers to the neoliberalization of the gay rights movement in the U.S. A similar tendency happens in Taiwan. See Lisa Duggan, "The New Homonormativity: The Sexual Politics of Neoliberalism," in Russ Castronovo and Dana D Nelson eds., *Materializing democracy: toward a revitalized cultural politics* (Durham [N.C.]: Duke University Press, 2002), 190.

people.²³²

I situate the emergence of new queer cinema in the Sinophone world, beginning from the late 1990s between these two impulses of new queer discourses. I will read the works of two self-identified independent queer filmmakers and activists—Mickey Chen from Taiwan and Cui Zi'en from China in relation to tensions between an affirmation of normative homecoming and a continuously deviant force of queerness that characterizes contemporary queer discourse. In the discussion that follows, I will analyze the aesthetic rendering of home-coming in the works by Chen and Cui. I seek to understand how queerness is articulated in relation to the normative meanings of home, especially “home” as a site where affective labor is allocated. How do their poetic visual and literary musings on the meanings of home engage in a sexualized critique of the new material condition of global neoliberalism?

Before I delve into the specificities of Chen's and Cui's works, let me present an overall picture of the changing landscape of queer cinema in the Sinophone world in the 1990s, against which the radicality of their works can be revealed.

New Queer Cinematic Familial Imaginations

If Ang Lee's *The Wedding Banquet* signalled a watershed moment in Sinophone queer cinema, then this seeming “feel-good” representation of the queer family can be

²³² According to Hans Huang's study, the gay rights movement in Taiwan increasingly becomes neoliberalized. See Hans Huang, pp. 120-131

seen as setting the tone for later new queer cinema. Garnering a Golden Bear Award in the Berlin Film Festival in 1993, *The Wedding Banquet* paved the way for Ang Lee to become an internationally renowned director. It is not surprising that *The Wedding Banquet*, even though a low budget independent film, gained a ticket for Ang Lee to be internationally recognized for its cinematic presentation of an image of “global gay life” from a “Chinese” perspective. As Yingjing Zhang cogently analyzes, in order for Chinese films to gain global visibility since the mid 1990s, the representation of Chineseness has always had it take into account moreover, a global visual politics configured around the looking West and the looked at East.²³³ In the case of screening Chinese queerness, a global visual politics is always at play. If queerness inevitably evokes an image of what Dennis Altman means by “global gayness,”²³⁴ then the visual marker of Chinese queerness must be identified with a politics of sameness and difference within this global gayness.²³⁵

In *The Wedding Banquet*, the family drama within the film certainly featured such a visual logic. Telling the coming out of the closet story of an interracial, upper middle class gay couple--Taiwanese Weitong and American Simon--in Manhattan, *The Wedding Banquet*, though produced with the low budget independent production company Good

²³³ He particularly talks about the example of *The Wedding Banquet*, the international success of which he attributes to its “oriental arts erotica as a mythified entity.” See Russ Castronovo 及 Dana D Nelson, *Materializing democracy: toward a revitalized cultural politics* (Durham [N.C.]: Duke University Press, 2002).

²³⁴D Altman, “Global Gaze/Global Gays”, *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 3, Vol. 4 (1997): 417–436.

²³⁵ There have been a lot of discussions about locally bound formations of queer identities in “non Western” locations alongside the power dynamics between the global and the local. For a theoretical engagement of the question of “global gay” and its postcolonial implications, see the introduction in Arnaldo Cruz and Martin F Manalansan, *Queer globalizations: citizenship and the afterlife of colonialism* (New York: New York University Press, 2002), 1–10.

Machine, offered its audience a visual pleasure that was not significantly different from that in a typical Hollywood romantic comedy. Punctuated with unexpected twists and turns, the plot is driven by this gay couple's scheme to produce a heterosexual marriage ceremony to satisfy the visiting Taiwanese parents' burning wish to see their son get married and produce heirs. For a global viewing subject, the pleasure of the gaze resides in the cultural specificities that are visually constructed within those moments of double role-playing, that is, those in which the global gay couple runs in conflict with Confucian familialism. The comedic resolution of these moments of conflict sutures a Hollywood romanticism with a Chinese family sentimentalism, especially in the moment when Weitong's father offers a red envelope of money to Simon as a gesture of reconciliation. In this moment of powerful silence, the gap between familial expectation and individual desire for romantic love is mended. While this final moment of reconciliation is not achieved with the same exuberance as most Hollywood comedies, the simple gesture of acceptance from Father Kao marks this affective moment of silent bodily communication as a quintessential moment of Chinese familial sentimentalism. As Rey Chow defines, the Chinese form of sentimentalism, by which she calls "warm sentimentalism," is about making-do, a tendency towards resolving social/ethical tensions through sentimental feelings.²³⁶ Once again, what Hans Huang identifies as "poetics of reticence" is at work here, though with a different purpose of sentimental resolution—the social-cum-cultural paradox between familial expectation and neoliberal individualism is overcome here with

²³⁶ See Rey Chow's definition of this culturally specific form of sentimentalism in her introduction to her work *Sentimental fabulations, contemporary Chinese films: attachment in the age of global visibility* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007).

such a small, but affectively powerful, gesture.

The familial sentimentalism eventually leads the audience to the final moment of resolution—a parallel montage that spatially and temporally reterritorializes a Chinese Confucian family in conflict with a cosmopolitan lifestyle. If the gay couple's desire for a life of global gay coupledness signifies an aspiration towards the cosmopolitan lifestyle, the driving dramatic conflict—the tension between the parents' Confucian ethical tenets and the couple's pursuit of individualistic, amorous freedom—will be satisfactorily undone at the end. As the nuptial scheme goes awry, the Mainland Chinese woman—Wei Wei—whom they invite to engage in a false marriage scheme with Weitong—accidentally becomes pregnant with Kao's child. After a culturally distinctive, carnival-like wedding banquet, where everyone gets insanely drunk, Weitong and Wei Wei are duped into having accidental sexual intercourse. This light-hearted plot twist, interestingly, is deployed as a device to resolve the driving familial tension by shielding it with an accidentally produced heir. The parallel ending montage epitomizes how this paradox is resolved. A temporary picture of familial harmony is staged, in which Weitong's parents sit in the middle, excited about the expectation of an heir, leafing through the pictures of the wedding. This temporary moment of familial reunion will soon be disrupted when the parents board a flight back to Taiwan—a moment of border-crossing/separation that is constructed spatially and temporally. While the new queer family in New York, made up of Weitong, Simon, Wei Wei and the soon-to-be-born heir, suggests a new kinship formation, the two aging parents, returning

to Taiwan with indifferent and sad looks, pass through the dark airport for a security check. The camera zooms in on the laughing faces of the three saying farewell, soon after cutting to the father, who lifts his arms for the policeman to check him. Shot in slow motion and set to the background music of traditional Chinese music, the father's arm-lifting moment ends the movie, creating an ambivalent feeling of triumph and surrender. This parting sequence deterritorializes the original family, rendering a diasporic dispersion of the family along a temporal-spatial scheme: the old couple, departing to the past in Taiwan, and the newly formed queer family, awaiting a future life in New York. The familial sentimentality in *The Wedding Banquet* does facilitate a call for homecoming. Nevertheless, as the ending implies, this homecoming is a paradoxical idea where the pull between the Confucian familial expectation and a neoliberalist aspiration for individualism is temporally and sentimentally resolved with ambivalent feelings.

This kind of familial sentimentalism abounds in queer cinema since the late 1990s in Taiwan. Even without depicting the dynamics of parent-child relationships, as in *The Wedding Banquet*, this corpus of queer cinema foregrounds the definitive meanings of home as a way to discuss the feasibility of queer identities. That is, how can queer identities be possible under the reign of Confucian familialism? If one seeks to retain the sense of harmonious belonging within this ethical kinship system, how can one strike a balance between familial demand and queer sexuality?

For example, *Murmurs of Youth* (dir. Cheng-Sheng Lin, 1997) features the

erotic/romantic encounter of two female teenagers in order to discuss the changing meanings and functions of familial intimacy as Taiwan enters into an increasingly class-divided society. Beautifying the transient romance of these two girls, *Murmurs of Youth* is a typical tale of love and loss, with a lesbian touch. Nevertheless, the heart-wrenching tale of the loss of lesbian love is only told to index a larger issue in the movie—the meaning of home. While *The Wedding Banquet* and *Murmurs of Youth* seek to ruminate on the changing meanings of home through the trope of homosexual love, other queer movies explore sexual identities through a consideration of the absence or loss of parental figures. *Blue Gate Crossing* (dir. Chih-yen Yee, 2002), *Formula 17* (dir. Yin-jung Chen, 2004), and *Eternal Summer* (dir. Leste Chen, 2006) are appropriations of the high school romance genre that remains popular among Taiwan's teenage audience. Instead of featuring the typical heterosexual couple in such a romantic genre, these feel-good queer youth romance movies complicate the notion of romantic love, either by triangulating homosexual and heterosexual relationships, as in *Blue Gate Crossing* or *Eternal Summer*, or by presenting the romance quest story of a typical gay Sister Carrie, as in *Formula 17*. Though the parental figures are all absent in these queer renditions of high school romance, the meanings of home still loom large in these queer tales about sexual awakenings. The meanings of home, with the absence of parental figures, are explored in this genre in moments when the high school youth ventures out to seek intimacy and romantic love among their peers. *Spider Lillies* (dir. Zero Chou, 2007) is a dark story about how a lesbian comes to terms with her sexuality. Such a coming to terms

is an outcome of her reconciliation with childhood trauma, marked by the loss of the Father. The absence or loss of parental figures in these examples of queer cinema index the unresolved issues between one's coming to awareness of queer identity and one's lingering in the comfort of childhood home.

As the aforementioned overview entails, the sudden burgeoning of new queer cinema instills larger libidinalized critiques of familial belonging; this cultural wave is not merely a locally informed phenomenon as Ruby Rich's historical account of the formation of global queer filmmaking in the 1990s suggests.²³⁷ Situating this emergence of queer cinema in the global context, we might conclude that, in the words of Deleuze and Guattari, this flourishing of new queer cinema is part of the larger deterritorialization of Oedipal desire as capitalism renders the fundamental domestic unit in capitalist production—the nuclear family—increasingly defunct.²³⁸ The depictions of queerness in these movies can be regarded as representations of libidinal drives that exceed the pre-existing normative frames of libidinal flow, especially where the nuclear family is concerned. Queerness, then, is shown to be a form of affect, an intensity of force that is beyond personal emotions. Queer affect here, as a force to affect and to be affected, is

²³⁷ New queer cinema is a term coined by Ruby Rich, by which she refers to the sudden outburst of independent films with homosexuality as their themes since the 1990s. The major factors contributing to this sudden outburst are technological and social. Technologically speaking, with the advent of cheaply sold digital camcorders on the market, more and more individuals have access to filmmaking without the constraints of financing. Socially, independently-organized queer film festivals emerged as new venues for these films to be exhibited and circulated globally. The burgeoning of new Taiwanese queer cinema is partially made possible by this formation of global queer filmmaking network. A lot of these films are made to target at international audience in various film festivals, whose cultural capital in return helps these films' release and circulation domestically. See Ruby Rich, *New Queer Cinema, The Director's Cut*, manuscript, 23-36.

²³⁸ Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: capitalism and schizophrenia* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983), 262–271.

impersonal; it is “the connecting thread of experience. It is the invisible glue that holds the world together. In event. The world-glue of event of an autonomy of event-connection continuing across its own serialized capture in context.”²³⁹ In this case, if personalized feelings and emotions are effects of subjugation/subjectivization within the familial-social apparatus, queerness here does not index representational personhood; it addresses those moments of conflicts, tensions, unresolved struggles from which sensations, bodily movements, and emotive explosions are generated. These melodramatic excesses generate sympathetic functions for the audience; nevertheless, in negotiating the question of sexual morality, in line with the Deleuzian concept of affect, they cannot be squarely resolved to reconstitute *ethos*. *Ethos*, root word of which connotes the meaning of a habitual place, will be transformed as the decoded flows of capital-money have rendered Oedipus “the displaced represented desire.”²⁴⁰

The desiring machine of a neo-liberalist world order²⁴¹ is thus constantly challenged and reshaped as queer affect emerges to reterritorialize the assemblages of normative institutions. If the nostalgic desire for homecoming, since the advent of modernity, has been there to remind all modern men and women of their longings to return to the interiority of one’s true sense of self, then queer affect in contemporary Chinese *tongzhi* cinema is a pulling force, perpetuating the tension between the sentimental call for homecoming and the ongoing deviant affective force to exceed such a nostalgic

²³⁹Brian Massumi, *Parables for the virtual: movement, affect, sensation* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2002), 217.

²⁴⁰Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, 266.

²⁴¹ For a Deleuzian discussion about how this new neoliberalism or global capitalism works, see Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2000).

resolution.

Nevertheless, if the constant deterritorialization and reterritorialization in the age of neoliberalism is facilitated by the new rules of capital flow and accumulation, a principle named by David Harvey as “flexible accumulation,”²⁴² then how do we understand this emergence of queer affect in the age of neo-liberalism as not just an effect of this new condition of flexibility? Or how, moreover, is this new queer affect not simply a part of this new regime of accumulation? To further argue how Mickey Chen’s and Cui Zi’en’s productions of queer desiring subjects work against this new regime of neoliberalist accumulation, I will first revisit a recent strand of queer thinking which attempts to find queer theory’s critical valence in the question of a global capitalist crisis.

Queer Affect and Value

In a recent issue of *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies*, a group of queer theorists gather to discuss queer theory’s relevance to economic theories and its possible intervention in the new logic of global capitalism.²⁴³ Their concerted efforts are to respond to the question of whether queer theory is “merely cultural” by foregrounding gender and sexuality as the core issues in the relations of production and reproduction.²⁴⁴ The key

²⁴²David Harvey, *The condition of postmodernity: an enquiry into the origins of cultural change* (Oxford [England]; Cambridge, Mass., USA: Blackwell, 1990), 124.

²⁴³Jordana Rosenberg and Amy Villarejo, "Queerness, Norms, Utopia," *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 18, Vol. 1 (January 1, 2012): 1–18.

²⁴⁴Here I am referring to a famous intellectual debate where some Marxist-leaning queer theorists accuse Judith Butler’s concept of performativity of being “merely cultural” and not relevant to “real” questions of materialistic equality. See Judith Butler, “Merely Cultural,” *Social Text* Vol. 52/53 (1997):

working concept among their various interventions is that of value. Borrowing Spivak's labor theory of value, their intervention "specifies, historicizes and analytically situates these bonds, relations, and affects in terms of the contradictions of the value-form: in terms of affective value, the value of labor, and the value of social relationships."²⁴⁵ That is, as they maintain, sex and desire, as culturally and historically constructed sites, are key matrices for us to understand how heteronormativity works in organizing our economic/productive lives. To go back to the question of the nuclear family, a queer intervention would question how the ideals of a nuclear family function to regulate sexuality. If the nuclear family is the organizing unit in capitalism's hetero-productive logic, then a queer intervention would explore the affective labors produced in such a family setting, seeking to understand how these affective labors are normative in terms of privileging certain forms of gender and sexuality over others. Along this line of thought, I will now explore how Chen and Cui respectively deal with the question of "family." In their cinematic and literary representations of home, what kind of affective labor is produced? How do they complicate the questions of gendered and sexualized identities/relationships with regard to the affective structures of home? How are the new familial relationships depicted in their works against the neoliberalist bourgeois logic of accumulation?

Sentimentalism Counter Political Awareness: Mickey Chen's Queer Documentary

265–277.

²⁴⁵Rosenberg and Villarejo, "Queerness, Norms, Utopia," 16.

The queer affect produced in Mickey Chen's works intervenes the value system adopted by Taiwan government's economic policy in its connection with the changing global division of labor. As my analysis in the second chapter shows, the modernizing regime of KMT in Taiwan adopts Confucian moral sentimentalism as a pastoral power, in order to launch its zoning technology as a way in which to enter global capitalism. Chen's call for social transformation stems from his aesthetics of queer affect, a melodramatic mode of excessively mimicking KMT's Confucian moral sentimentalism.

Starting his career with a documentary on the historical gay wedding between a prominent gay writer, Yusheng Hsu, and his American boyfriend Gray, Mickey Chen had already established his guerrilla style of documentary filmmaking during his student days at CUNY. Making most of his documentaries with camcorders, Mickey Chen is famous for his visual experiments with hand-held cameras and use of heavy-loaded affective elements, such as everyday life scenarios of emotional tension, emotive music, and tear-jerking moments. His affective strategy, rather than simply indulging his targeted audience in emotional release, aims for a larger and higher purpose—to challenge his audience's preconceptions about politics and ethics. For example, his first documentary, *Not Just a Wedding Banquet*, pays critical homage to Ang Lee's internationally renowned *The Wedding Banquet*. If Ang Lee's *The Wedding Banquet* resolves, through visual sentimentalism, the social paradox that every Chinese gay man and woman has to confront, then Chen's *Not Just a Wedding Banquet*, as its title blatantly announces,

challenges such a sentimental penchant for resolution. It retains the familial sentimentalism in *The Wedding Banquet* only to provoke political awareness and further action for social change.

With the preparations for the first public gay marriage in Taiwan as the overarching thread running through the film, Chen interweaves this gay couple's wedding planning process with interviews of around 70 self-identified gay men and women, documenting how they feel towards this landmark gay marriage. His recording of the wedding preparations focuses on the sentimental interactions between the couple and their families, ostentatiously capitalizing on emotive power for the purpose of social persuasion. Intercutting these scenes detailing the wedding planning with the sobering, painful stories of everyday gay man and woman, Chen allows the familial sentimentalism of the wedding planning to be framed by reminders of harsh reality. Emotions collide with rational debates on gay marriage. Family sentimentalism is somehow transformed into *ressentiment* for the wounded queer subjects to emotionally call for social recognition and empowerment by way of a collectively projected shared hurt feeling.

This stark contrast between emotional persuasion and political anger thus marks the distinctive style of Mickey Chen's documentaries. His documentary style gains unprecedented popularity after the release of his second work—*Boys for Beauty*, a documentary recording four gay teenagers' respective struggles with family pressures and career choices in relation to the various social class positions that they occupy. Noted for both its unconventional sentimental elements and entertaining values, *Boys for Beauty*

succeeded in being released in mainstream movie theatres, marketed as a feature film to compete for popular box office revenue. After the success of *Boys for Beauty*, Chen has continued his endeavors with documentary filmmaking, sustaining his combative spirits in fighting against gender inequality and sexual injustice. His later documentaries all have strong political agendas, but in terms of visual style, they are lyrical and poetically sentimental. In other words, what might seem like a paradoxical choice to Western politically minded filmmakers has become the signature of Mickey Chen's confrontational social documentary. To understand how this seemingly paradoxical sentimental politics works, I propose to look at Chen's aesthetic strategy—his tactics of melodrama—in the context of Confucian moral sentimentalism. My analysis of KMT's moral sentimentalism in the second chapter indicated that it was used as a form of soft power to implement the regime's pastoral control during Cold War Taiwan. The subversive power of Chen's works resides in his appropriation of this affective structure, turning the tables on its own legitimacy in order to expose the inherent contradiction of this moral system. In so doing, he retains the affective force within this pastoral power, yet only to demand for the public recognition of alternative modes of affective alignments and intimate relationships.

To illustrate how his melodramatic tactic works as a means of making queerness visible, I will focus my discussion on two of his latest films—*Scars on Memory* (2005) and *Fragile in Love* (2007)--, as well as on his memoir, *Taipei Dad, New York Mom* (2010). I will discuss the intermedial intertextuality between his works, seeking to

understand how his earlier video works already pave the way for him to launch a sentimental rewriting of the normative definition of family in *Taipei Dad, New York Mom*.

Scars on Memory, a documentary on the lives of middle-aged to senior gay men in Taipei, was funded by Taiwan Public Television. As the last part in Mickey Chen's Tongzhi Documentary Trilogy, *Scars on Memory*, distinctively different from the previous ones, which celebrated youth and embraced life, is a poetic rendition of the poignant questions of loss, aging, and death facing middle-aged to senior gay men. Starting with the story of Grandma, the nickname for the owner of one of the oldest gay saunas in Taipei, Chen tries to tell the classic story about the loss of love and the ephemerality of intimate relationships from the alternative perspective of queer lives. As its Chinese title poignantly indicates, the stories that we will encounter are tales about "a city haunted by memories and a family without a partner." Set against a medium shot of a luminous moon floating amidst ink-brush painting-like clouds, the film title expresses a poetic sense of sentimentality that runs through many Chinese poems about the vicissitudes of life and the sentience of being. This sentimental poetics sets the stage for Chen's critical engagement with the questions of companionship and intimacy, which he suggestively links to larger questions of national identity in the beginning. The documentary starts with a parallel montage, bifurcating the political stances of two intimate gay friends, Grandma and Aunt Jiang, a standoff reflective of the increasingly

intensified political antagonism in Taiwan between the pro-blue and the pro-green.²⁴⁶ A seemingly irrelevant political detail to the larger sentimental depictions of these senior gay men's stories of heartbreak and loss in the demimonde of Taipei, the beginning political allegorical dimension, not simply a frivolous digression, is actually an important clue for us to understand Chen's sentimentalism.

Sentimentalism's journey into modernity has lent itself to the confinement of the private sphere, where emotions and sexual desires are properly contained. By showcasing how political passions, affects that are associated with the public sphere of the *polis*, make their way into domestic intimacy, Chen seems to suggest the inseparability of the two.²⁴⁷ Or, in meddling with the interstices between the public and private, Chen aims to challenge his audience's preconceived notions about these boundaries. As the opening sequence unfolds, Aunt Jiang, while sitting comfortably in a coffee shop and ready to protest against the DPP administration, is on the phone arguing with his beloved Grandma, who, in contrast, is about to throw himself in the parade in support of the DPP administration. As their nicknames suggest, these two senior gay men, both living off of the business of a gay sauna, are not simply friends; they have formed an emotional bond similar to a Confucian kinship intimacy. Calling each other Grandma and Aunt, these

²⁴⁶As my second chapter details, the national identity crisis in Taiwan since the late 1970s eventually evolved into a serious standoff between the pro-blue (leaning towards the KMT regime and a pan Chinese identity) and the pro-green (leaning towards the independence-advocating DPP regime and a strong Taiwanese identity).

²⁴⁷Here I am referring to a strict bifurcation between the public and the private, which allocates states of affairs divided along the rational and the emotional lines respectively to the public and the private. Feminist and queer theorists have raised questions about such a view of the public and the private divide, especially in how the relegation of sexual or affective matters to the private sphere is actually a strategy of sexual management that renders queerness invisible and unspeakable. For examples of such a critique, see Lauren Berlant and Michael Warner, "Sex in Public," *Critical inquiry*. 24, Vol. 2 (1998): 547.

putative strangers form an alternative kinship structure, appropriating the kinship positions from the official script only to queer its ethico-political implications. Their self-fashioned kinship relationship subverts the public/private divide by reformulating a homosocial relationship from the horizontal world of business and civilians into a queered domestic kinship relation that cannot even find equivalence in the normative scripts. Their self-formed kinship bond, as the opening sequence implies, however, is now unsettled by external political forces.

Nevertheless, as this parallel montage will eventually reveal, this divide is used comically by Chen to suggest the absurdity of how the public/private divide might function to render queerness invisible by relegating sexuality to the sphere of the private. As Grandma and Aunt's argument gets over-heated, a group of middle-aged women approach Aunt in the coffee shop. Upon hearing their fight on the phone, this group of women immediately assumes the caring roles of "aunties" or "senior female family members" to console Aunt Jiang. This scenario is telling of how the private/public divide, a social feature marking modernity's organizing principle since the advent of capitalist liberalism in the West, might still not be totally applicable to contemporary Taiwan.²⁴⁸ The residual effects of Confucian moral sentimentalism can still be observed here. If in the structure of Confucian moral sentimentalism, the society and state are

²⁴⁸Many scholars from the Confucian cultures have talked about how such a separation might not be totally relevant to modern societies evolving from Confucianism, given that Confucianism does not instill a total separation of the private from the public. Rather, it entails a gradual extension from the private to the public. Please see Dahua Cui, "A Weakness in Confucianism: Private and Public Moralities." *Frontiers of Philosophy in China*. 2.4 (2007): 517-532.

considered an extension of the kinship family, then these women's natural inclination to adopt kinship positions in approaching a stranger tells us how such a symbiotic social function might still be relevant in today's Taiwan. What's even more relevant is their overzealous peace-making intent. Judging by the way that they assuage the fight, I can observe how their natural inclination to take on the roles of "elder aunties" in order to persuade Aunt Jiang to settle with his "Grandma" is informed by such a symbiotic continuum from the personal to the public. This transcultural moment of staging the question of the public versus the private divide provides Chen with a chance to undertake his queer sentimentalism. If the Western public and private divide operates to render the question of sexuality invisible through an implementation of strict separation, then Confucian moral sentimentalism organizes the society through a chain of social cohesion that subjugates the private under the surveillance of the public in forms of extended hierarchized kinship relations.

Chen, nevertheless, is not using the Western liberalist model as an antidote to the Confucian mode of social organization. On the contrary, his queer sentimentalism prizes such a symbiotic social cohesion, valuing the warm feelings produced by the familialization of strangers. This queer sentimentalism is a strategy to use sentimentalism against moral sentimentalism. That is, if in the normative kinship script, sentimental feelings among the kinsmen and women are generated to secure the ethico-political orders of the norm, then Chen retains these sentimental feelings. He does this, however, not for the purpose of sustaining such a normative function, but rather in order to create

alternative intimate relationships through these sentimental moments. In this sequence, the shared sphere of warm feelings of kinship between these women and Aunt Jiang will soon be revealed to be a moment of affective pedagogy, when these elderly women assume senior positions in order to “lecture” Aunt Jiang. They tell him that one should always respect his “Grandma,” no matter how much one disagrees with her. Upon hearing this, Aunt Jiang cannot help but start to giggle, because he is the only one who knows that the “Grandma” he calls by such a name is definitely not the typical “Grandma” in a normative kinship structure. This slippage of understanding is Chen’s queer sentimentalism, a parodic mimicry of the function of kinship. Rather than totally getting rid of the moral sentimentalism from the normative kinship system, Chen theatricalizes this sentimentalism in order to open up new forms of social relationships enabled by this sentimentalism; his appropriation of Confucian moral sentimentalism plays along with the notion of extended relationships between the private and the public, disrupting the seemingly secured symbiotic cohesiveness for the purposes of imagining alternative socialities on the symbiotic chain between the personal and the political.

The sentimental dialectic between the personal and the political is indeed the running thread that connects all the vignette stories in this documentary. Featuring two personal stories about the loss of a beloved, *Scars on Memory* focuses on the personal journeys of Jinhun and Yimou, two gay men who both lost their long-term partners after they passed away from cancer and AIDS, respectively. Documenting how they deal with the unspeakable pain of loss, either through acts of remembering or forgetting, *Scars on*

Memory zooms in on the melancholic feeling of loss, telling the stories about how Jinhua and Yimou come to terms with the passing away of their beloved. The film, after the initial comic sequence of Grandma and Aunt's fight, unfolds with the respective sentimental journeys of Jinhua and Yimou, under Grandma's assumed matariarchal protection, to their deceased lovers' original families for reconciliation.

The melancholic feelings in most melodramas are tied with the unspeakable. In previous studies on melodrama, scholars have established how the affective is often used either to resolve or to reveal the unspeakable, as a way to deal with the socio-political paradoxes of hegemonic social relationships.²⁴⁹ As moments of excess, those unspeakable moments are materialized through highly emotionally charged bodily movements, facial gestures, and social interactions. These excessive moments are used to maneuver, in the words of Laura Mulvey, "over-determined irreconcilables."²⁵⁰

By contrast, Chen's documentary aesthetics is an attempt to speak about the loss out loud, through sentimentalizing the lingering effects of the loss, a melodramatic tactic utilized to affectively address the unspeakable. For example, the most powerful moments in the documentary that address the unspeakable are two affectively intense moments in which the questions of Confucian kinship are again contested. As most melodramas seek to reveal the "moral occult,"²⁵¹ with the restoration of innocence; the questions about what

²⁴⁹ John Mercer and Martin Singler identify melodrama as a rhetorical mode that "exists at the very limit of a visual and dramatic medium like cinema; it attempts to articulate those things that it is almost impossible to represent—melodrama speaks the unspeakable and represents the unrepresentable." John Mercer and Martin Shingler, *Melodrama: genre, style, sensibility* (London; New York: Wallflower, 2004), 97.

²⁵⁰ Laura Mulvey, "Notes on Sirk and Melodrama," Christine Gledhill, *Home is where the heart is: studies in melodrama and the woman's film* (London: British Film Institute, 1987), 76.

²⁵¹ Peter Brooks, *The melodramatic imagination: Balzac, Henry James, melodrama, and the mode of*

is right or wrong; or what is “just” or “unjust” are always played out over the figures of the innocent. In *Scars on Memory*, both Jinhua and Yimou need to embark on a journey back to innocence in order to affectively bring out their unspeakable pain. Similar to how the cabin in *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* indexes the originary place of innocence in the home, the towns of Yilan and Taitong, respectively, serve as symbolic spaces of nostalgic innocence. These are the hometowns of the deceased lovers, located in two remote counties on the east shore of Taiwan, far from the decadence of metropolitan Taipei. Our following the protagonists on this “homecoming” journey, back to their deceased partners’ original systems of kinship, is part of Chen’s strategy to allow queer relationships to be recognized.

By bringing the audience along with Jinhun and Yimou on this journey to the innocent past, Chen invites the audience to embark on a sentimental journey. The two protagonists first depart from metropolitan Taipei, where wounds and loss underwrite one’s alienating or traumatic encounter with modernity; in a reverse journey, they come to terms with their traumatic pasts. Their journey to the past is also one that traverses the social and historical history of Taiwan’s passage into modernity. If metropolitan Taipei is where capital and migrant laborers converge to feed into the capital-production machine of the nation state, then their respective journeys are a nostalgic call for those who have experienced the deprivation of home to re-enter the comfortable territory of pre-modern innocence. The allegorical place of one’s origin is also where our most intimate family members remain. Jinhua returns “home” to a newly formed queer family, in which

excess (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1976), 5.

Grandma now becomes the surrogate matriarch. Assuming the role of Jinhua's deceased lover's surrogate mother-in-law, Grandma invites the sisters of the deceased lover to welcome their unrecognized "brother"—Jinhua. In this moment of final reconciliation, no one speaks about the "true" relationship between the two men, but everyone embraces one other, crying out loud over each other's shoulders. It is in the midst of this tear-drenched familial sentimentalism that the "original" and the queer kinships are eventually connected, further extending the meanings of family into the queer realm. Similarly, Yimou, who can only be disguised as his deceased lover's "contractual brother" at his funeral, is also finally accepted into his deceased lover's family after he pays a visit to the mother in Taitong.

Chen's affective intervention in the unspeakable does not remain at the personal level. His documentation sutures the personal with the political, putting the stories of personal loss alongside significant events marking the history of the gay rights movement in Taiwan. For example, in narrating Yimou and his deceased lover's story, he inserts the footage that he shot during the police raid of A G,²⁵² showing a policeman's brutal response to his documenting the event. In so doing, Chen tries to remind his audience that queer personal life is always at the mercy of public political force.

The ongoing dialectic between the personal and the political in Chen's queer sentimentalism, as my analysis above indicates, lies in his poetic rendering of a powerful

²⁵² A G was the first gay gym owned by Yimou and his lover. It was eventually shut down due to a raid by the police, which was carried out without any proper reason. After hearing news of the raid, Mickey Chen rushed there to record the police's brutal crackdown. His tape, nevertheless, was confiscated by force.

site of affective politics within KMT's Confucian moral sentimentalism—"home". It is the normative meanings of home that serve as the metaphor for ultimate belonging, as well as the fundamental unit that holds the symbolic chain from the personal to the political together. "Home" is thus the core issue in many of Chen's queer films. While *Scars on Memory* is a documentary of various stories of the personal-cum-political, told in order to invite the audience to remember its own stories of homecoming, *Fragile in Love* is a poetic image experiment, or a visual philosophizing, on the question of home in the era of the neoliberalist quest to satiate one's sexual appetite. In a post-sexual shaming world of unbounded queer sexual expressions, how has the meaning of home been radically redefined when the institution of monogamous, heteronormative coupledness is also put on trial?

In *Fragile in Love*, no narrative is provided. The poetic rendering of images is akin to a music video, structured here alongside the movement of stanzas from a poem by contemporary Taiwanese poet Jingxianhai. This visual poetic experiment follows a young man who wanders between a group sex party and a monogamous relationship, stylistically juxtaposing the sensuality of sculpted young male bodies with a sense of loss that stems from the fragility of the monogamous relationship. Is Chen lamenting the disillusionment of romantic coupledness, to which all bourgeois gay men aspire? Or is he romanticizing "the sexual sociability of cruising," idealized by Leo Bersani as a form of sociability for us to naturally "treat the outside as we would a home"?²⁵³

²⁵³Leo Bersani, "Sociability and Cruising," *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Art* 2/3, Vol. 2/1 (2002): 22.

Chen's visual musings on the meanings of home—either by way of complicating its normative meanings through one's journey to the traumatic past, or through a poetic reflection on the possibility of a non-normative sexual home away from monogamy—are fused together in his writing on the family—*Taipei Dad, New York Mom*.

The Task of Homecoming

In 2011, Chen published his memoir *Taipei Dad, New York Mom*. Hailed by many scholars and cultural figures as a major milestone, *Taipei Dad, New York Mom* enjoys growing readership and continues to attract wide attention and publicity. Simply put, the publication of this book has become an event in Taiwan's recent cultural and literary scene. Within the dialectical relationship between aesthetics and politics, I intend to read the social significance of the publication of *Taipei Dad, New York Mom* as a cultural landmark. My reading regards Chen's writing as a queer melodramatic imagining of alternative familial belonging, which produces a transnational critique of a modernizing state's grand narrative of progress-qua-national solidarity.

The sentimental queer affect in *Taipei Dad, New York Mom* must be considered against the question of desire and value in Taiwan's changing position in the global division of labor since the 1960s. The theme of searching for lost memories from *Scars on Memory*, and the question of domestic normativity from *Fragile in Love* can be intertextually found in Chen's writing on the family here. In his films, he uses the

documented bodies to generate affect as moments of excess within the Confucian kinship script; these affects are transported in his writing through narrative and visual images that are nicely and intermedially choreographed to work on its readers. What kind of reading strategy, then, can help us to understand Mickey Chen's autobiography, not merely as another addition to the growing body of literature that features representations of homosexual or sexual dissidence, but as a radical queering of the power-knowledge in service of the biopolitical state of Taiwan? How do we account for the prevalent sentimental affect throughout his work?

The Melodramatic Mode of Neoliberalist Imagination

To read the tension between queerness and biopolitics, I suggest that we look at sites of the melodramatic in the family romance of *Taipei Dad, New York Mom*. First, let me explain the critical resource on melodrama from which I draw. Melodrama, in the 1970s and 1980s, started to be treated seriously by feminist film scholars who read its emotional excess as a site of “ideological contradiction, exposing the failings of capitalism and/or patriarchy.”²⁵⁴ My employment of melodrama here is similar to Peter Brooks's definition of “the melodramatic mode of imagination,” as “the effort to make the ‘real’ and the ‘ordinary’ and the ‘private life’ interesting through heightened dramatic utterance and gesture that lay bare the true stakes.”²⁵⁵ As Peter Brooks demonstrates, the

²⁵⁴Mercer and Shingler, *Melodrama*, 20.

²⁵⁵Brooks, *The melodramatic imagination*, 14.

melodramatic mode historically first emerges after the French Revolution, when “the traditional imperatives of truth and ethics have been violently thrown into question, yet where the promulgation of truth and ethics, their instauration as a way of life, is of immediate, daily, political concern.”²⁵⁶ Following Brooks, I look at the melodramatic mode as an aesthetic expression of the question of ethico-political value (re)formation in the midst of historical rupture, especially when the previously dominant value system is no longer functioning.

If the *pathos* in melodrama indexes moments of excessive, hyperbolic emotions, then it is always intrinsic to the constitution of *ethos* in the dialectical space between the melodramatic world on stage/screen and the real world of the audience. Dramas of familial intimacy, by way of the hyperbolic, usually employ a sentimental education, in order for the viewing public to ponder what is the moral life of a proper citizen. In this sense, we could look at the melodramatic mode of imagination as a technology of the subject, which cultivates the moral sentiments and sensibilities of modern citizen life, especially when the definition of humanity, along with a society’s passage into a different order, is under serious contestation.

While celebrating melodramatic excess for its potential of transformation, I, nevertheless, am reminded of its nature of subjection. Cael Keegan’s conception of “queer melodramatics” unveils how aesthetics and politics work with and against each other in the American imagination of democracy. Studying queer visibility in American popular culture, she perceptively points out that “the melodramatic manipulation of the

²⁵⁶Ibid., 15.

feeling queer body operates as an affective technology of democratic hegemony.”²⁵⁷ As sites of affective excess, this “feeling queer body” in popular American melodramatic culture is rendered by moments of injustice-cum-hope, in order to delay the promise of final emancipation. In so doing, queer melodramatics, in Keegan’s terms, are deployed aesthetically to resolve the political paradox of equality and freedom within American liberal democracy.

While mindful of the pitfall of intercultural borrowing, I, nevertheless, would not be keen to point out the fundamental cultural differences between Western and Asian melodrama. Wimal Dissanayake tells us that Western melodrama centers on the individual’s tension with the family, whereas in Asian melodrama, it is the other way around.²⁵⁸ For me, this distinction runs the risk of a common cultural essentialism that pits the more individualist West against the presumably collective East. In the case of my study, I do not believe in a transhistorical mode of Chinese (or should we say Taiwanese?) melodrama, but rather observe a similar tension between aesthetics and politics in the emotionally charged family romance of certain local cultural forms. I utilize the melodramatic mode of imagination to address the aforementioned issues concerning the question of sexual and moral sentiment in the ongoing mutual constitution of the public and the private. To discuss Chen’s melodramatic mode in its local specificity, I situate its emergence in the geo-political (or geo-historical) conditions of possibility; that is, in

²⁵⁷Cael Keegan, “Queer Melodramatics The Feeling Body and the American Democratic Imagination” 2010, 5, <http://proquest.umi.com/pqdweb?did=1974753351&sid=5&Fmt=2&clientId=39334&RQT=309&VName=PQD>.

²⁵⁸Wimal Dissanayake, *Melodrama and Asian cinema* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 4.

Taiwan's aspiration to become a neoliberalist state under the auspices of the American ideology of development and modernization.

Post-Martial Law Taiwan, rather than offering a deviation from the “authoritarian” regime of KMT, indeed strengthens its state ideology of the already-implemented American developmental model of liberal democracy. The appearance of queer visibility at this stage is merely another addition to a multicultural ideology, or a celebration of “ethnic diversity” that is embraced by the modernizing state. I argue, rather, that Mickey Chen's *Taipei Dad, New York Mom* is not merely such an addition to the increasing body of queer representations in the media and cultural landscape of Taiwan; it is instead foremost a melodramatic imagination of Taiwan's passage into the emerging global neoliberalist order. By meshing dirty family laundry with collective memory, *Taipei Dad, New York Mom* opens up an intimate public sphere of readership,²⁵⁹ educating all of the aspiring global citizens from Taiwan on proper feelings and moral sentiments. *Taipei Dad, New York Mom* highlights moments of sentimentality and loss in Chen's queer coming-of-age story, spectrally evoking wounds, traumas, and ruins in Taiwan's embrace of ruthless modernization. In these highly emotionally charged instances, the queer melodramatic moments in *Taipei Dad, New York Mom* surge to unveil the paradox of Taiwan's modernizing neoliberalist ideology. The hyperbole of familial tension and the spectrality of lost time will eventually exceed the realm of private intimacy in order to disturb the rational sphere of national memory. In the case of a developing Taiwan, to think of the national, one always has to deal with the trans-national, especially where the

²⁵⁹Berlant, *The female complaint*, 10–13.

reproduction of a domestic affective life dictated by the global logic of production is concerned.

The Stench of the Father and the Smell of America

Taipei Dad, New York Mom follows the chronology of a narrative of self-growth, but its temporality is far from the teleology of a typical *Bildungsroman*. The rise of the *Bildungsroman* in its early German tradition functions to facilitate “the movement of German literature toward its maturity, and this literature, in turn, is to inspire the unification of the German nation.”²⁶⁰ *Taipei Dad, New York Mom* does not represent “the organic development of the hero toward maturation and social integration.”²⁶¹ On the contrary, it interweaves the past with the present, meshing the temporality of the deceased and the lost with that of the living and the surviving. In so doing, *Taipei Dad, New York Mom* produces a spectral effect, one that is identified by Marc Redfield as the paradoxical nature of a *Bildungsroman*—“the impossible generation of identity or meaning out of a tangled pile of articulation that, like letters assembled into words, serve as the fragments of a fictional skeleton.”²⁶² It is between the striving for a final achievement of spiritual home (*bildung*) and the repeated, failed performative linguistic and visual attempts to narrate and record such an achievement that the melodramatic emerges to mock rational

²⁶⁰Todd Curtis Kontje, *The German Bildungsroman : history of a national genre* (Columbia, SC: Camden House, 1993), 29.

²⁶¹Ibid.

²⁶²Marc Redfield, *Phantom formations : aesthetic ideology and the Bildungsroman* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1996), 93.

morality and the queer is bodied forth to disrupt a familial-cum-national order. The realism of the photos in the book only attests to the impossible task of its ghostly recording. As Chen himself denotes, the writing of this book is “like a ghost returning to an already-destroyed home”; his *Bildungsroman* is “a complicated melodrama, woven together with a weaver’s perseverance.”²⁶³

Like a melodrama or a *Bildungsroman* itself, the Oedipal familial drama takes up central stage in *Taipei Dad, New York Mom*. If in Lacanian psychoanalysis, the patriarchal Symbolic indexes a subject’s final integration into the realm of law and order, then *Taipei Dad, New York Mom* defies such a normative structure of subject formation. The book starts with a section entitled “Farewell to My Father,” in which Chen poignantly records the failure of his father’s earlier business and how this collapse determines his queer, deviant path of growing up. This section begins with a triumphant story of a common upwardly mobile narrative—the father’s rising up from his social station through the technology of photography. This memory of triumph and victory ends abruptly, however, and ensues with the tragedy of a sudden business crash and family disintegration. The withering father starts to seek a revalorization of his masculinity through alcohol and adultery, and eventually has to escape from his debtors to the U.S. with Chen’s mother. After this primal scene of family disintegration, Chen confesses his inability to narrate the story in a linear and orderly fashion. Instead, the narrator splits himself into another character, attempting to rationalize the impossibility of

²⁶³Junzhi Chen (陳俊志), *Taipei ba ba, Niuyue ma ma*(台北爸爸紐約媽媽) (Taipei Shi: Shi bao wen hua chu ban qi ye gu fen you xian gong si, 2011), 11.

remembrance:

He already could not tell the fictional from the real. Borders are marked to initiate the power of the storyteller. Let there be a promised land with blossoming flowers. Let there be light of the genesis. He comes to a realization of this principle on a hallucinatory trip. That time, he almost got caught on the other shore.²⁶⁴

Often, in these moments when narration blends into poetics, consciousness turns into fantasy, and presence crosses over to absence, Chen evokes the quintessential spectral figure who haunts the entire narrative—his deceased sister. These moments usually happen at the margins of social propriety, where moral decorum yields to transient intimacy with strangers. On the bed of a hotel room, he (the split personality of the narrator) and a young spirit-medium cross the line of ethics to engage in sexual intercourse. In this moment of intensified bodily sensations and emotional excess, the hyperbolized desire for intimacy with a stranger surprisingly brings back the memory of the deceased sister. In Chen's narration, the sudden death of the sister from an overdose remains an unanswered puzzle in his life, a black hole in the Symbolic world of order, to which "he tries in every possible way to get close."²⁶⁵

The spectral presence of the deceased sister thus disrupts the logic of kinship in the kind of nuclear productive family that is promoted by the modernizing state of Taiwan. The modernizing state of Taiwan, in its embrace of rapid industrialization and

²⁶⁴Ibid., 35–36.

²⁶⁵Ibid., 39.

urbanization, adopts the nuclear familial technology to manage population and productivity. On the one hand, it is deployed to break the agricultural mode of the Confucian extended familial structure; on the other, it inherits the Confucian ethical order for the construction of a spiritual space of belonging for its citizens. The sister deviates from all of the feminine virtues sanctioned by such a new familial model. She does not attend school and stay at home docilely. She goes out clubbing and indulges in drinking and dancing. In the normative script of family romance, she is not a model daughter who prepares herself to be good housewife material. Her death, in the father's eyes, is a price that she has to pay for wandering away from the realm of familial order. The death of the sister, rather than serving as a moral lesson for Chen to become a model son, becomes a traumatic wound that prevents him from abiding by the pedagogy of the father. Queerness in *Taipei Dad*, *New York Mom*, therefore, is inseparable from wounded femininity.

What seems to be a failure in the process of *Bildung*, then, turns out to be an incentive for transformative action. If wounded femininity in melodrama usually induces tears and pathos, then these are usually moments, according to Linda Williams, "that seek dramatic revelation of moral and irrational truths through a dialectic of pathos and action."²⁶⁶ Theatricalized moments of *pathos* do not simply indulge the readers/spectators in overflowing sentiments; pathos pushes the limits of rational thinking and "moves" the readers out of their composure. Furthermore, the "moved" and "touched" audience will

²⁶⁶Linda Williams, *Playing the race card: melodramas of black and white from Uncle Tom to O.J. Simpson* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2001), 42.

proceed to take action in reconsidering the ethos. Building on Williams's observation, I argue that, in *Taipei Dad, New York Mom*, the violence that befalls the sister does not reinforce the patriarch's phallic authority. By contrast, it pushes Chen to reconsider the ethical order underlying the modern Confucian familial system. As the withering father sheds his glory and emits stench, Chen makes his choice to say farewell to "the father figure" and chooses to "rise with the perseverance of the moon."²⁶⁷ Chen's queerness is a nonconformist gesture against the kinship impulse of Confucian social ethics. After bidding farewell to the Father, he turns to the sea of strangers, seeking contingent familial intimacy and bonding.

His breaking away from the bonds of familial kinship is further facilitated by the absence of the mother. While the father accepts his failure of a life in the U.S. and returns to Taiwan, the mother stays in the U.S. and starts working menial jobs as an illegal alien. For Chen, the returned father decays with the stench of senescence, in contrast to his absent mother, whose embodied presence is gradually replaced with a ritual of annual gifting. In the days when international communication was a luxury, especially for an underclass person in an underdeveloped country, Chen's only connection with his mother is through the letters and packages that she sends from New York. While Chen makes efforts to visualize the details of his mother's life, the spatiotemporal divide only frustrates him, reducing the embodied memory of his mother to the limited, trivial records of her life through her letters and exotic American goods in the mailed packages. "The smell of America" has thus become a sensory connection with the absent mother. Chen

²⁶⁷Chen, *Taipei ba ba, Niuyue ma ma*, 78.

tells us:

Oh, yeah! There is an “American smell” I almost forgot. Years after, when I was a grad student in New York, I rediscovered this crude, unevenly shaped chocolate in an old-style bakery in Brooklyn. When I savored this rediscovered taste, a repugnant sense of bitterness rushed to the tips of my brain. Suddenly the ghost of time returns to haunt my entire body. Memory of a childhood with an absent mom permeates my entire being. My mom was lost in the U.S.; her kids were left in Taipei....Later on, the baker told me why the chocolate was in such a weird shape resembling a ruined Chinese cookie. He told me it was made in the cheapest ingredients; therefore, no delicate cutting procedures were needed. In the winters during those years, mom always sent a Christmas package to her kids in Taiwan from New York, which included oversized American winter coats that would last us for years, and a pile of chocolates underneath the coats. Whenever we opened the package, the fragrance of the chocolates would rush out to embrace us. We fought to reach the chocolates only to be disheartened by the bitterness of them.²⁶⁸

When maternal nurturing is replaced by the smell of America, it dawns on Chen that his desire for familial reunion is fundamentally a fantasy. His Bildungsroman takes a queer, melodramatic turn and leads him to the world of arts and cinema. On the imaginary canvas of desire and pains, he creates alternative alignments of intimacy and kinship.

Intimacies between the Penumbra

To understand how Chen’s aesthetic tactics work, I will further introduce the concept of

²⁶⁸Ibid., 47.

the “poetics of reticence.” In post-war Taiwan, the modernizing regime of the KMT adopts a revised version of the Confucian ethical system to revive a “Chinese” social order and hierarchy. In Jen-peng Liu and Naifei Ding’s discussion of the “poetics of reticence,” they perceptively reveal how a postcolonial recuperation of classical virtues can easily help to sustain the regime’s state ideology and relegate queerness to the unspeakable.²⁶⁹ I suggest that we can link their deconstruction of the poetico-politics of reticence with Hsiao-hong Chang’s fabulous articulation of the “queer family romance,” in order to consider queer forms of familial intimacy. Chang delineates how the revival of a Confucian model of the symbiotic correlations between individual, family, society, and the nation-state implements a kinship impulse in contemporary Taiwan, as an affective technology of national subject formation.²⁷⁰ At the end of their essay, Liu and Ding present an anecdote between a shadow and a penumbra from *Chuang Tzu*. In this dialogue, the penumbra unfailingly inquires of the shadow as to why he keeps changing positions. Out of annoyance, the shadow responds in an indifferent manner, saying that he himself does not know the source of his changing positions. In addition to employing the penumbra as a metaphor for the unspeakable queer, Liu and Ding, in my view, draw upon the assertiveness of the penumbra in order to envision a possibility for queerness to emerge. Rather than implying a strategy of identity visibility, they suggest, in my view, that queerness is a mode of interrogation for the ongoing reorganization of ethos. While

²⁶⁹Liu Jenpeng and Ding Naifei, “Reticent poetics, queer politics”, *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies* 6, Vol. 1 (2005): 30–55.

²⁷⁰Xiaohong Zhang (張小虹), *Guai tai jia ting luo man shi*(怪胎家庭羅曼史) (Tai bei shi: Shi bao wen hua, 2000).

the shadow ignorantly follows the commands of the supreme order, the penumbra challenges them. In this process of cross-interrogation, the order of symbiotic ethics is put to a test; the space for alternative alignment of intimacy and social connection is made possible.²⁷¹

Mickey Chen's deviation from the Confucian kinship impulse is a testimony to the penumbra's queering of reticence. His description of dissident sexual practices is explicit and unabashed. Turning the negative feeling of shame into a celebration of transgression, Chen's writing is a practice of penumbra queering that reverses the moral education of feelings into an endless exploration of the uncharted territory of human relationships. The opening chapter frames the entire narration of family romance as a practice of confession, indexing an intimate public space where the readers are invited to share his sentimentality. Nevertheless, rather than creating a top-down style of address that connects the narrator's authority with the readers in a homogenously national public space, the opening chapter, entitled "All by myself on the road; Desiring Home-Coming," presents us with a moment of transnational intimacy between Chen and his one-time friend, an older, female Japanese filmmaker named Asako. Through the circuits of the international filmmaking community, Chen gets to befriend Asako in Osaka. The two bond immediately over their similar attitudes towards life—they are both struggling artists who sacrifice material comforts for the artistic pursuit of truth and justice. In a bar in Osaka, the drunken Chen sees his deceased sister in this Japanese woman. Spectral haunting creates a transient moment of intimacy between penumbras. Chen lets down his

²⁷¹Jenpeng and Naifei, "Reticent poetics, queer politics", 50–55.

guard and starts to talk about the pain and trauma of his family. Surprisingly, Asako in turn shares a similar story. This bonding moment leads to another intensified moment of intimacy. Asako invites Chen to go back to her hotel. After Asako takes off her kimono and lays it on the side of the bed, Chen feels a moment of embarrassment over being alone with a female. In this moment of sexual fantasy, Chen sees his deceased sister in Asako. Chen writes: “As time slowly passes by, a memory flashes in my mind. It was a summer day in a shaved ice place, a dessert place run by our eldest Aunt. We were both little kids helping out in Aunt’s store. My sister bends over to help wash the dishes. She was about to reach puberty. The emerging curve of her cleavage grabs my eyesight in the moment of bending. It was just one second but it remains in my memory.”²⁷² After this moment, Chen starts to officially narrate his family story to Asako. Framed in such a structure, we might regard Asako as an embodied addressee in the story for all of the readers. In the sea of strangers, Chen tries to tell us that we are all Asako to him, that intimate stranger who reminds him of those past moments of familial bonding. Creating moments of intimacy among penumbras, Chen’s family romance goes beyond the realm of national sympathy and betrays the Confucian kinship impulse. He brings us all together in a transnational affective community.

Queer Melodramatics and the Neoliberalist Order

Nevertheless, Chen’s narrative is far from a celebration of global mobility and

²⁷²Chen, *Taibei ba ba, Niuyue ma ma*, 19.

cosmopolitanism. His queer melodramatics, to return to Cael Keegan's conception, are on the one hand made possible by the global neoliberalist order; on the other, they harbor energy and pathos that challenge and destabilize the political order implied in this new imaginary of global cosmopolitan citizenship. Far from an unreserved embrace of the interstitial space created through global capital or cultural flows, Chen's narration reminds us of the historical traumas and memories of global exploitation. If the stench of the father and the smell of America seemingly provide us with a sensory structure of the decaying past and a utopian futurity, then the ideology of the American dream is troubled in Chen's transnational tale of diasporic intimacy. In recording the rise and fall of the family, through its dispersions and realignments, Chen does not bypass the larger historical backgrounds against which these personal stories take place. The fall of the family is connected with the global energy crisis in the 1970s and Taiwan's economic dependency on the U.S.. The mother's relocation to the U.S., rather than being a celebration of global mobility, is narrated as a migratory story of global proletarianization. New York is not a shelter for the impoverished third world subject. While acknowledging how the next generations become successful model minorities in the U.S., Chen focuses his narration on the daily rhythms of the laboring mother, who moves from Chinese restaurants to sweat shops and to the mailing room of a post office for survival, who depends on basic English phrases and overseas Chinese newspapers for social networking, and who pinches every penny to feed her deserted kids on the other shore of the Pacific Ocean as the only reason to carry on.

Stories of his mother's survival, however, do not turn into self-pity. These melodramatic accounts of the discrimination an illegal migrant laborer has to go through renders the mother as the quintessential image of "the starving mother." Chen tells us that:

that year when California Fitness center opens its first store in Taipei, I walked into a space washed with the clean and cold blue light of capitalism. While I was running on the treadmill, a middle-aged cleaning lady was going between machines to polish them. Her action was swift and efficient. I could not take my eyes off her. Among urban elites and expensive imported equipment, this woman was standing alone, staring at the melodrama on the TV screen. She quietly smiled and fell into the world of the fictional on the screen.²⁷³

This woman, among "all those female laborers at the bottom of societies, home or abroad," reminds Chen of his mother. As the starving and laboring mother ages, Chen laments, "one after another, they are bound by the chains of history and destiny; with the point of no return, they keep marching on to the future."²⁷⁴

If globalization paints a rosy picture of a future of global co-prosperity, then Chen, through his queer melodrama, seems to remind us of the delayed promise of equality and freedom as otherwise reassured by the political rhetoric and fantasy of neoliberalism. Spearheaded by the U.S. and England, neoliberalism, coming out of the liberalist tradition of Anglo-American liberal democracy, also needs the element of melodrama, as

²⁷³Ibid., 201.

²⁷⁴Ibid., 211.

we see in the example of the passage above, to cover up its intrinsic paradox of global inequality and relative individual freedom. Chen's queer melodrama, however, does not cover up such a paradox. On the contrary, by announcing in the last sentence that "you and I are both people with no home to return," his queer melodramatic tactic is a vehement denial of any normative script of affective citizenship. If *Taipei Mom*, *New York Mom* reads like a national allegory of Taiwan, then the dynamic of the spectral and the melodramatic makes this allegory not a celebratory tale. Queerness evokes the penumbras of Taiwan's neo-liberalist integration into the world system, bringing those who are sacrificed and exploited back to the center stage of this historical passage. They appear in moments of transnational queer intimacy, taunting the neoliberalist global order that all modernizing, developing states aspire to abide by.

A Home of Shadows and Penumbras

The tour-de-force of Chen's acts of remembrance thus suture a personal confession with the question of national memory. If the modern nation state, as part and parcel of the global project of modernity, subjects all beings to the homogeneously historical empty time of the global expansion of capitalism, then the postcolonial national space of belonging, far from being a shelter for the colonized to recover from the traumatic experience with Western colonial violence, simply reiterates such a spatio-temporal structure for its own modernizing purposes. Nostalgia, in modernity's

temporal structure, becomes an impulse towards reclaiming an imagined bygone past, or, in the postcolonial context, the spiritual home to which the moderns long to return. National allegory, as the function of *Bildungsroman* suggests, creates a coterminous relationship between personal fantasy and collective ideology, linking the destiny of the individual to the fate of the nation. Nostalgia operates in a similar logic, but reverses the teleology of the nation-state's passage into the future; it serves rather to evoke a past for the disoriented, so that they may grasp its present stance in the train of historical progression.

Taipei Dad, New York Mom projects the condition of nostalgia into such an allegory, rendering the future always a site of spectral haunting, as Chen defines the final destiny of his queer becoming—"a home with shadows and penumbras." Chen's disruption of the homogenous national body/space by way of queerness and spectral femininity is similar to Bliss Cua Lim's analysis of female haunting. In her reading of the temporal dimension in postcolonial Hong Kong and Philippine cinema's representation of historical past and present, Lim looks at moments of the spectral and the fantastic to tease out the complication of temporality, historical consciousness, and postcolonial identity. She discovers how the feminine, in these spaces, is usually represented as/with the spectral and the fantastic, thus constituting a site of nostalgia for allegorical purposes. In so doing, "haunting is most poignant when the spirit relives the traumatic past, making the repetition of hopes thwarted and injustices committed truly spectral in their splitting of national historical time." She goes on to say: "Ghostly temporality's retelling of historical

injustice retains the power to outrage, the inordinate singularity of a first time.”²⁷⁵ In other words, the nostalgia brought by the spectral does not appear to be worked through, but rather haunts the present with a demand for reevaluation/remembrance of the past. Lim further explicates: “in these films, nostalgia is not mere distortion but a position, an allegorical one, from which to read and revalue the ruins which ghosts have gathered”²⁷⁶ Similarly, the melodramatic moments in Chen’s writings bridge the past and the present, as the deceased and departed return to haunt these spaces. Family trauma, therefore, disturbs the historical consciousness of national progression. In the case of the neoliberalist aspiration of Taiwan, we may consider *Taipei Dad, New York Mom* to be a temporal critique of the state’s ideology of “advancing” to the global public sphere of rational thinking. Behind the ideology of progress and democracy, the spectres of yesterday are brought back along with the wounded and the sacrificed. This queer act of poetic justice is thus not to resolve the wound by undoing spectral haunting. Queerness will always evoke the melodramatic, and encourage the spectral to intervene in the homogeneous and empty global public space. In the “home” of shadows and penumbras, we are all homeless wanderers and spirits, floating in “darkness with shimmering words, images, scenarios, characters and breaths; floating in thin air, we all spin and morph like clouds.”²⁷⁷

²⁷⁵Bliss Cua Lim, *Translating time: cinema, the fantastic, and temporal critique* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2009), 170–171.

²⁷⁶Ibid., 160.

²⁷⁷Chen, *Taipei ba ba, Niuyue ma ma*, 280.

Post-Socialist Remaking of Home

While Mickey Chen dwells on the power of Confucian sentimentalism for the purposes of queering the normative meanings of home, Cui Zi'en, also a self-identified openly gay activist/independent filmmaker, adopts, on the other side of the Taiwan Strait in Mainland China, a very different aesthetic strategy to interrogate the rising normativities of home in post-Socialist China.

Born in a catholic family in Harbin, a city located in the Northeastern part of China, Cui grew up witnessing how Catholicism and Christianity were oppressed by the Chinese communist regime; this marginalized religious feeling is later on interestingly connected by Cui to his minoritized feeling of being gay. After gaining a master's degree in Chinese literature, Cui became a teacher at the Beijing Film Academy, where he is currently based. Educated in the Chinese lyrical tradition, Cui was also heavily influenced by the literary sentimentalism that abounds in Chinese poetics, a trait he attempts to purge through his experimental filmmaking.²⁷⁸ As he explicitly states in a manifesto on audience, he pursues a confrontational mode of aesthetics that does not take the audience's comfort zone into account; rather, his confrontation is an unflinching political statement that seeks to shock his audience, so as to awaken it from the ideological fantasy in which it has been indoctrinated. For Cui, his aesthetics is employed to "destroy" and to "demolish" the edifice of state ideology.²⁷⁹

²⁷⁸ Personal communication.

²⁷⁹ Personal communication.

Cui's aesthetics are thus in line with the generation of an underground filmmaking culture that emerges during the post-Socialist era. Upholding a politicized "realism" as their credo, these underground filmmakers aim to create a "reality" that is supposed to be a sobering antidote to the "reality" sanctioned by the state. In light of this, Cui's aesthetics is different from Mickey Chen's. Cui adopts an antagonistic strategy against state-sanctioned Realism, while Chen implodes the KMT's moral sentimentalism from within. As the official slogan of "harmonious society" embraced by the PRC government indicates, the governmental ideology in the post-Socialist era is to render social antagonism invisible by creating a harmonious social sphere. By drawing our attention to the margins of this "harmonious" society, Cui's films relentlessly pop the bubble of its supposed harmony; the images he creates are purposefully disharmonious and jarring, creating dissonant non-narratives that keep his audience on the edge. Nevertheless, his combative aesthetic style starts to soften up in his *huailun* (壞倫 broken ethics) trilogy, a sentimental turn that culminates in his recently published writing on the family. In my following discussion, I will trace Cui's sentimental turn from his earliest works, seeking to understand what this sentimental turn might entail. I will end my discussion by focusing on this latest aforementioned piece on the family.

Cui Zi'en and His Queer Family Romance

As my analysis in the third chapter indicates, post-Socialist China witnesses the

urgent need to reconstruct the space of “home,” literally or metaphorically, in order to re-anchor people’s feeling of being uprooted during the frenzy of revolution. With the onset of the market system and rapid industrialization, another wave of social reorganization is under way, as the rise of metropolitan cities starts to relocate peasants from their farmland to urban spaces. This proletarianization produces massive numbers of migrant workers who drift in urban centers. While the slogan of harmonious society intends to cloud the disparity between those who benefit from this industrialization and those who are exploited and oppressed by it, the independent filmmakers since the 1990s do not want to “lie” about this truth with their cameras; rather, they are dedicated to “exploring marginal people and their marginalized life.”²⁸⁰ For these combative spirits, social reality is in line with those marginalized lives. In terms of narrative and visual styles, they further deploy non-mainstream elements, ranging from using “real people” as actors, to disruptive narrative threads, to overt experiments with theatricality, in order to produce their views of reality.²⁸¹

Cui’s earliest movies are produced with similar artistic beliefs. His first work, *Men and Women* (1999), is a deliberate deconstruction of any kind of normative domesticity. Starting with Gui Gui, a radio announcer who hosts a show named *Public Restroom Horizon*, the beginning of this film sets up a familiar space for the Chinese audience, as the show is obviously a parody of a popular TV show aired on CCTV—*Oriental Horizon*.

²⁸⁰ Zhang Yingjin, “Truth, Subjectivity, and Audience in Chinese Independent Film and Video,” in Paul Pickowicz and Yingjin Zhang, *From underground to independent: alternative film culture in contemporary China* (Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield, 2006), 51.

²⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 30.

First aired in 1993, *Oriental Horizon* is a *60 Minutes* kind of newsmagazine show. Hailed as the pioneering show that changed the Chinese audience's viewing habits, *Oriental Horizon* plays an important role in consolidating the national body of post-Socialist China as it brings in national as well as international news into the domestic setting of each household with a TV set. Cui's *Public Restroom Horizon* is obviously a parody of this show, through which he unsettles the public versus private divide that is organized along the gendered demarcation of the domestic sphere. Here Cui and Chen share a similar political agenda of unsettling the public/private divide. Nevertheless, Chen's sentimental approach is rejected by Cui. Cui is more interested in parodic appropriations of conventions in order to create resignification. If *Oriental Horizon* fosters a new Chinese imagined community with its newly introduced codes of civility, then Cui's *Public Restroom Horizon* does not intend any such codifying intention. This show is broadcast by Gui Gui to his gay lover Chong Chong, who avidly collects "public restroom literature" and wants to publish a magazine named "beautiful public restroom." Cui's fascination with the public restroom is not limited to this film. His *The Pros and Cons of the WC* is a highly theatricalized public debate on the use and organization of public restrooms. By complicating the "public-ness" of the public restroom, Cui blatantly pushes his audience to rethink how sex is managed and regulated along the public/private divide. As he starts to go on TV talk shows and comes out as an openly gay person, Cui realizes the importance of discourses that interfere with the idea of an inviolable public or private sphere.²⁸²

²⁸²Chris Berry, "The Sacred, the Profane, and the Domestic in Cui Zi'en's Cinema", *positions: east asia*

The story of *Men and Women* is a radical deconstruction of the idea of the domestic sphere. Featuring Xiao Bo, a migrant worker in Beijing, the story begins with Xiao Bo's encounter with a female shopkeeper for whom he works. The female shopkeeper takes Xiao Bo in, to stay with her and her husband. After the couple finds out Xiao Bo's sexual orientation, though, they try to set him up with a female friend of theirs. Their scheme, however, does not get realized. The female shopkeeper has move in to with the friend that was supposed to be set up with Xiao Po after escalating flights with her husband. Xiao Bo also runs away from the house after the homophobic husband tries to rape him. Xiao Bo moves in with Chong Chong. This decision also unsettles the exclusive intimate life of the gay couple, Chong Chong and Gui Gui. With the plight of the homeless figure of Xiao Bo, *Men and Women* not only challenges the formations of intimacy along gender lines, but also pushes us to rethink the definition of "affective labor," especially how it is conventionally aligned with femininity and domesticity in a liberalist nuclear family setting. The disintegration of the heteronormative household in the story leaves the prideful patriarch alone in an empty house, spawning two alternative formations of intimacy—the implied lesbian couple comprised of the female shopkeeper and her female friend, and Xiao Bo's adoptive gay family. In telling such a story, Cui invites us to reconsider how caring and belonging can be reterritorialized in different forms of familial structures.

This theme is also picked up in his *Old Testament* (2001), a triptych portrait of perverse family dynamics, featured in three intervals: 1981, 1991, and 2001. Alongside

cultures critique 12, Vol. 1 (2004): 198.

the movement of the domestic timeline, Cui suggests how the social reception of homosexuality has changed over the past three decades in China. The first segment is about a gay teenager's struggle with his family, which ends up tragically. The second segment is a triangulated love story between two men and a woman, whose tangled relationships also end tragically. The final segment is most poignant and confrontational. It tells how a gay couple struggles to take in a HIV positive stranger as a third member of their household. All three parts, however, share the component of an outsider whose arrival into the domestic sphere leads to a change in the power dynamics of the household. By doing so, Cui seems to pursue an ongoing redefinition of romantic love and the love-based marital bond. As the most challenging last episode asks us: what does it mean for a couple to take in a stranger with HIV so that he may find shelter? Is this kind of love more serious than romantic love? How is this different from ordinary compassion that transcends individual calculation, or, on the other hand, the logic of give and take that one finds in a romantic relationship? In an interview, Cui explicitly states his view of love as follows:

I don't really believe in *ai-qing* (romantic love between two people). I believe in love and sex, but *ai-qing* is simply too limiting. When I love someone, it might have different forms at different moments, *teng-ai* (loving tenderly), *lian-ai* (loving tenderly with a tint of sympathy), *xi-ai* (liking a lot), and so on. All are different. *Ai-qing* is too narrow to cover them all.²⁸³

²⁸³Zi'en Cui and Qi Wang, "The Ruin Is Already a New Outcome: An Interview with Cui Zi'en", *positions: east asia cultures critique* 12, Vol. 1 (2004): 194.

Cui's deconstruction of the concept of *ai-qing* is not a negative one. Rather, it is a productive critical move that, on the one hand, dismantles the sanctity of romantic love, revealing how it is the ideological basis for modern heteronormative coupledness as an institution; on the other hand, by multiplying the definitions of romantic love, Cui seeks to proliferate the forms of love, extending it outside of bourgeois sentimentalism. As this ongoing critical deconstruction of the dialectic between normative romantic love and the alternate transformations of intimacy in *The Old Testament* suggests, Cui is pushing us to extend the delimiting contours of love to boundless possibilities of human fraternity. His philosophy of love is similar to both Foucault's definition of "friendship"²⁸⁴ and Leo Bersani's concept of new affective alignment.²⁸⁵

To achieve such a critical reconceptualization of love, Cui nonetheless refuses the use of sentimental elements. On the contrary, he chooses an unfriendly visual style, one that challenges the viewing conventions of his audience. He purposely refuses to create a coherent narrative structure for the audience to identify or sympathize with the characters. His visual style reflects his antagonistic view towards the audience. For example, in *The Old Testament*, he punctuates the three sections with three segments of a singing chorus, which provides commentary on the significance of the stories and prevents the audience from identifying with any of the characters. Cui's historiography of how the queer challenges and redefines the family in *The Old Testament* does not adopt a teleological

²⁸⁴ Michel Foucault, "Friendship as a way of life," in Michel Foucault and Paul Rabinow, *Ethics: subjectivity and truth* (New York; New York: New Press; Distributed by W.W. Norton, 1997), 136–140.

²⁸⁵ Leo Bersani, "Sociality and Sexuality", *Critical inquiry*. 26, Vol. 4 (2000): 641.

logic in which we anticipate a final moment of triumph where a homonormative household is formed. Rather, by casting a shadow over the promise of gay marriage and monogamous coupledness, Cui seeks to resist the neoliberalist co-optation of queer subjects into an increasingly global bourgeois universalism. Hesitant to embrace a celebratory view of China's increasing queer visibility, he is keen to make visible the newly marginalized/excluded subjects that are rendered invisible in this new rhetoric of queer liberation. For example, Cui's depictions of sex workers in Beijing are rendered along the same lines. In visualizing the commodified nightlife, Cui does not present us with a glamorized Chinese aspiration towards Western metropolitan life; rather, his visual presentation of sex workers' nightlives is a vivid provocation of social contradiction, a visual philosophizing on the question of value and desire in the context of China's post-Socialist emulation of Western capitalist life.

In *Night Scene* (2004), Cui follows his signature episodic deconstructive aesthetics. First produced as a documentary, it begins with a series of interviews with money boys, a term referring to gay men who make a living with sex works in China, who talk about their ultimate goal in life as being the pursuit of romantic love. Cui is obviously setting up the typical societal view, one that holds that these "fallen souls," whose prostituting lifestyle is due to circumstantial constraints, will eventually be redeemed with the promise of true love. Nevertheless, in constructing these gay Camilles as "harlots of gold hearts," he has two deconstructive purposes. First, when one of the money boys says,

“only when a man breastfeeds can a man become a true man.”²⁸⁶ This is a strong political statement, and by featuring it, Cui subverts the gender codifications of womanhood and manhood. In the case of post-Socialist Chinese gay men’s aspiration to bourgeois respectability, this statement about feminizing oneself through the act of nurturing is a powerful antidote to this masculinizing impulse towards normative manhood. What follows this statement is a series of lessons for acquiring manhood, in which we see an older man who encounters a younger one in a cruising site in a park. Telling the younger one that “this is not where you are supposed to come,” the old one urges the young one to do pull-ups, so as to “man up”. The lesson on body building is followed by a mock lecture on the meanings of true love. We then cut from this scene that calls for the discipline of body and soul to one that features Cui himself, who is robbed of the toy sheep that he holds in his arm. Given Cui’s background in Christianity, this abrupt shift may signify how his pastoral power, his visual right to represent these money boys, has now been taken away by someone with more force. As the scene cuts to a series of interviews with scholars/specialists, we will understand how the more powerful discourse broker is this army of scholars and specialists, who have more knowledge-power than Cui to speak for the money boys. The following interviewing sequence juxtaposes the opposing voices of Wan Yanhai and Li Yinghe, through which Cui intends to present competing discourses about the social significance of male

²⁸⁶ This is a reference to his earlier film, *Enter the Clown*, in which a dying mother, played by Cui himself, begs her son to breastfeed her. The son turns his back to the camera and performs fellatio on the mother. Cui’s audacious metaphorical link between breastfeeding and fellatio challenges the audience’s concept of “nurturing,” a perversion that disrupts a Freudian theory of sexual development by way of reshuffling the erotogenic zones.

prostitution. While Wan, a leader of an HIV prevention organization, talks about the danger and drudgery of a male prostitute's life, Li, a feminist academic activist, entertains the idea that male prostitution might challenge the patriarchal control of the female body.

In addition, Cui explicitly shows the subjects of the money boys themselves in the frame. By framing them sitting together with the specialists, he invites the audience to ponder over the question of agency: that is, can the "money boys" speak? Cui, as the director, will eventually have his representational power back, but as aware of how visual politics works as he is, he will not formulate a seamless master narrative to speak for his subjects. His ongoing episodic structure towards the end becomes a random montage of the money boys going in and out of the Fish Bar where the money boys work. By featuring some extreme close-ups of the tropical fish swimming in the water tank, is Cui making an analogy between the fish and the flamboyant creatures, thus commenting on how they still manage to shine and flame in spite of their confinement? As one of the money boys explicitly says to the camera, "we also have our own fantasies and dreams." Then, with the use of a medium long shot, the following sequence, featuring a cross-dressing group of money boys dancing, echoes such a statement of agency by creating a nonintrusive space between the viewers and the money boys, allowing us to see how they enjoy their daily routines without judgments. The joyous group dancing sequence cuts back to the close-up on the water tank, where someone is now feeding the fish. The theme of nurturing/giving thus returns. We will soon be transported to an even more transcendental moment when the film ends with a close-up on a clock tower, set to

the background music of a folk song that intones, “Mountains are Clean and Water is Still.” As in many of Cui’s works, *Night Scene* ends with a transcendental image, which here, in the form of a church clock tower, evokes the religious feeling of the passing of time. The background music further brings in a harmonious picture of nature. But Cui’s perversion of human sexuality entails a radical deconstruction of order. His transcendental impulse, probably informed by his Christian background, should not then be considered as a gesture of heralding back the kingdom of God’s reign, but rather as a cosmic transcendence that unassumingly incorporates all the differences in the world.

Cui’s emotionless political provocation starts to soften up when he launches his *Trilogy of Broken Ethics*, a series of beautifully rendered stories about the meanings of kinship, especially how kinship intimacy might have taken on different meanings in a world of capitalist consumption and acquisitive individualism. I will now engage in a discussion about his sentimental turn, which is related to the rise of dysfunctional nuclear family in post-Socialist China as epitomized in a popular TV drama.

Broken Ethics and Sentimental Salvation

The dysfunction of the nuclear family has become a major social issue in the rapidly modernizing nation of China, a social phenomenon exemplified by the popularity of a recent TV melodrama in the mid 2000s—*The Chinese Style of Divorce*. The ontogenetic transformation of familial roles in Chinese television underscores the deeper tensions

within the Chinese family itself. From Xie Jin's melodramas in the mid 1980s to the first popular TV melodrama, *Yearnings*, in the 1990s, the exiled patriarch has slowly been welcomed back to the hearth of the home through the affective labor and reparation of the female characters. However, the return of the patriarch raises the questions of a woman's position in society, that is, the gendered division of labor along the public and private divide. As the broken picture of the family in *The Style of Chinese Divorce* depicts, monstrous feminine desire, as represented by the discontented wife, seeks to break the confinement of the domestic setting and consequentially becomes the threat to the new familial orders. This discontented mother, in the show, represents the paradoxical driving force of boundless capitalist desire for material accumulation and upward mobility—a desire necessary for the unbridled growth of the capitalist economy, and yet, at the same time, one that poses a direct threat in the form of a crisis to the existing social-familial structure. The show tells the story of loyalty and betrayal in an ordinary Chinese nuclear family. Unsatisfied with what the husband makes, the wife urges him to get a promotion in order to have a better prospect for the family's material life. The husband eventually devotes himself to more work and starts to come home less frequently, causing the wife to suspect his having an extra-marital affair. Now lonely and filled with resentment, the wife unwittingly falls into a trap set up by the husband to see if his wife is loyal to him. The wife's driven personality turns her into a femme fatale, who finally causes the disintegration of her family when she explodes with her angst and frustration, thereby exiting the domestic proper and leaving her now promoted husband to get a new wife.

From Xie Jin's melodramas to *The Style of Chinese Divorce*, then, we might map out how popular social psychology has changed the views of what constitutes a "good" family life by examining the changing representations of gender in these popular texts,. Extending beyond my brief description above, we will see how the family unit in capitalist China has taken on the characteristics of bourgeois domesticity, especially in regard to how the division of labor has been redrawn along the gender line.

It is against this changing social mediascape of new familial imaginations, I argue, that Cui's *Trilogy of Broken Ethics* stands in response, engendering a novel thinking towards the family crisis in China's post-Socialist modernity through the queer family romance. Made in the mid-2000s, Cui's *Trilogy of Broken Ethics* starts to narrate stories in a more linear fashion, regardless of its persistent unconventional framing and scene length. It begins with *Withered in a Blooming Season*, a story about a seemingly incestuous love between a sister and a brother, who are left to live together on their own by their single mother, who is busy with her own hotel business and love affair. The story is a typical coming-of-age sexual awakening for the brother, a teenager who struggles to walk a thin line between his love and morbid obsession for his sister. As the title "Broken Ethics" overtly reveals, this trilogy includes stories about dysfunctional family kinship structures, in which parental authorities are absent or depowered, and the meanings of kinship intimacy are thus tested. In *Withered in a Blooming Season*, this seemingly incestuous relationship between the sister and the brother is set against story of the unconventional maternal figure—a successful businesswoman who provides her children

with material means but not genuine care. A similar father figure is presented in the second part of the trilogy—*My Fair Son*. The father is also a single parent who successfully shelters his son with bourgeois material comforts, while being negligent of his emotional needs. The absence of parental figures in both films indexes the lack of affective labor. Nevertheless, as the stories in both films unfold, the sons and daughters experiment with new forms of intimacy and affective bonds in their co-dependence on others. This deterritorialization of desire, far from a lament on the defunct kinship function, turns out, in Cui's rendition, to be a celebration of new intimate possibilities, or the transcendence via sentimental resolution.

In *Withered in a Blooming Season*, the brother's passion for the sister goes awry as he starts to intervene in the sister's love affairs with other guys. He even convinces his homosexual lover to volunteer to be the sister's father, after she claims that she is pregnant. The melodramatic plot twists culminate at the moment when the mother finds out that her lover is involved with her daughter. After demanding that the two be separated, the daughter officially moves back to the apartment where she used to live with her brother. Now the three of them--the sister, the brother, and the brother's homosexual lover--sing a song, "Youth Under Moonlight," together. In this feel-good moment, a sentimental moment of new intimacy is formed. With the image of the flower of *viola tricolor*, the withering is reversed, and the three continue to blossom with a new form of kinship structure.

My Fair Son is the story about an absent father's reparative attempt to foster his

effeminate son's growth into a young adult. Busy with building his business, the father has been absent, leaving his son to be raised by the grandfather. Now, with the success of his business, the father welcomes the son "back" to a bourgeois home filled with modern décor. Nevertheless, the son has become a "deviant" young man who indulges in homoeroticism. After finding out about his son's deviant behavior, the father tries in every way to rectify this mistake. He first adopts a tone of patriarchal authority, lecturing his son about the importance of the material things in life. Then he chases away the son's homosexual friends and asks a member of his staff, Xiao Bo, to spend time with his son. The son sees Xiao Bo as an ideal older brother figure and eventually grows fond of him. After a scene in which the father catches the two in the act of sleeping together naked, the father fires Xiao Bo from his company, and is determined to raise his son properly. The final conciliatory gesture by the father is a shocking moment when paternal love turns erotic. The father walks into his son's room in the middle of the night, trying to hold him from behind, while naked. This incestuous attempt toward reconciliation is met with the son's cold shoulder. The movie ends with the son squatting alone, atop a building surrounded by high rises. He raises his head to stare at the shining sunrise, on which we are left with an extreme close-up. Followed by this extreme close-up is a series of photos of the son's growth, though presented in reverse chronology. The question of time is thus proposed right after an image of transcendentalism. Cui's religious poetics of transcendentalism once again comes just in time to uplift the feeling of sentimentality and loss in this story of a modern dysfunctional family. Modernity's alienating effects on

human affective life are here mitigated by this temporary transcendental moment.

The last component of the trilogy is called *Refrain*. Once again, this story focuses on the borderline between brotherly love and incestuous amorous passion between kin. The thin line between homosociality and homosexuality has been an important battleground for modernity to secure its sexual moral order. Cui's last part of his *Broken Ethics Trilogy* tackles the sexual power-knowledge dynamic of modernity head-on by presenting us with a seemingly incestuous story of brotherly love. *Refrain* starts with two naked young men sitting side by side in bed. Without speaking a word, they interact by using facial expressions, animalistic sounds, and musical instruments. One seems to be bored and angry, while the other appears to be intellectually disabled and content. The intellectually disabled one places coins on the chest of the other, trying to get his attention. They play a guitar and sing a love song. It seems like they are singing the song to themselves alone and to each other at the same time. Then one begs the other to let him go out to sell his songs. In this eroticized *Waiting for Godot*-like sequence of existential ennui and suffocation, the relationship between the two is not clearly established; we only witness the changing power dynamics between the two when a sadomasochistic struggle between love and control is visualized. It is not until the next sequence, when the younger brother starts to recite the content of his will as he writes it, while the older brother restlessly giggles to the side, that we find out the dynamic of the relationship—the younger brother has been taking care of his intellectually disabled older brother single-handedly. As the younger brother will soon pass away from some unknown ailment, he is drafting up a will

to forbid his brother from selling his songs for a living, even after he is gone. After the will drafting scene, the following sequences are visual epitomes of Chris Berry's definition of Cui Zi'en's aesthetics—The Domestic, The Sacred and The Profane.²⁸⁷ We see the two brothers walking together, singing and selling flowers; we see them trying to stage a double suicide by attempting to be run over by a train on a railroad track; we see them engage in daily routines—cooking, eating bread, and singing songs. This sequence of quotidian domestic life will eventually lead to a Catholic ritual of transubstantiation, where the sacred and the profane meet. Lighting candles, the older brother performs a Catholic ritual of transubstantiation for the dying younger brother. They wash each other's feet and drink wine together. And the ritual ends in an act of sexual consummation, in which the older brother performs anal sex on the younger one. After climaxing, the older brother starts taking pictures of the now dead younger brother, after which he then slowly extinguishes the candlelight. The movie ends with the older brother wandering alone on a deserted railroad track, along which he spreads his deceased brother's ashes. While looking into the stars and moon in the sky, he chants poetically, saying that the stars and the moon are his brothers' eyes. Similarly to *My Fair Son*, this film ends with a close-up on a shining cosmic object—here, on starlight, thus ending this trial of brotherly love.

It is in challenging or meddling with the conceptual borders among the domestic, the sacred, and the profane that Cui pushes his audience to rethink the meanings of brotherly love. Considering how the order of modernity is hinged upon the strict separation

²⁸⁷Berry, "The Sacred, the Profane, and the Domestic in Cui Zi'en's Cinema".

between homosexuality and homosociality, the perversion of the sacredness of human fraternal compassion is Cui's ostentatious attempt to disrupt such a policing. Sexual intercourse, ironically, does not diminish the sacredness of fraternal love; in Cui's poetic rendition of a ritualistic process, the perversion of incestuous sex is sanctified, as the final moment of poetic mourning brings brotherly love back to the level of cosmic transcendence. The experience of fraternal love, in the final scene, is informed by the ritual of transubstantiation, and thus figured with the nakedness of the two male bodies that evocatively eroticizes the body of Christ.²⁸⁸ The sexual and the religious are miraculously meshed together here, which further leads us back to reconsider the depictions of domestic quotidian life in the earlier part. If human life is all about affectively supporting each other, then the ultimate meaning of transcendental love, Cui seems to suggest, does not lie outside of the domestic sphere of daily rituals. It is in the affective labor that we produce for others, in those seemingly minute moments of cooking, signing, and listening, that we exceed our humanistic subjecthood, traversing the existential borders between self and other to form affective bridges in connection with the many others in the world. The absolute meaning of fraternal love, in the visual dialectical processes among the domestic, the sacred and the profane, lies in those mundane rituals of affective exchange, through which a human community of compassion will be achieved.

This gesture of religious compassion is Cui's redemptive move in dealing with the

²⁸⁸ A similar strategy is also used in his early short film *Mass*, in which we see two naked men facing a cross on the wall, saying the Lord's Prayer.

question of “broken ethics” in a China that is increasingly encroached upon by the alienating and relentless capitalistic pursuits of material accumulation. His queering of the normative ethics of the kinship structure does not stay at the level of purposeful deviation or perversion. His perverse renditions of love and intimacy rather seek a redemption through sentimentalism, which can uplift us from the melancholic dwelling on loss and impossibility. The feeling of sentimental kinship in all three of his trilogy segments ends on positive notes, where we respectively see the formation of a new kinship bond, the transcendence of cosmic harmony, and the sanctification of fraternal love.

The Big Dipper Has Seven Stars

With the same religious transcendental impulse, Cui publishes his autobiography in 2012. Unlike Mickey Chen’s *Taipei Dad, New York Mom*, which is a melodramatic appropriation of the KMT’s Confucian moral sentimentalism, Cui’s writing on the family, entitled *The Big Dipper Has Seven Stars*, is a quiet and distanced documentation and evaluation of his family members’ lives. Its opening statements frame the whole family romance in a tone of transcendental peacefulness—“The Big Dipper has seven stars, shining lights in moments of departure. Our kinsmen are our closest time and space in this human world. We use our softest memories to warm each other; we use our sharpest

light to light up each other, regardless of distance, life or death.”²⁸⁹ Using the image of the Big Dipper constellation to analogize the relationships within his family, Cui connects their life stories without centralizing himself, giving them individual treatment with respectful and reflective distance. Similar to the episodic form that runs through most of his experimental films, this text is composed of small vignettes featuring each family member’s different life stories. Starting with his grandparents’ generation, Cui’s narration adopts a third person perspective, using an objective, emotionless way of telling stories. In Cui’s own account of his parents, he attributes a gendered characteristic to the respective style of his parents’ narrations. In the piece called “Two Narrative Styles,” he tells us that both his father and his mother are storytellers. Nevertheless, they tell different stories with different styles. His mom always tells personal stories from the past, whereas his dad only recounts moving stories that he reads or hears from somewhere else. In terms of style, his mom’s narrative style is “subjective, first-person perspective, mixing description, argumentation and lyrical expression,”²⁹⁰ while his father adopts “an objective, third-person perspective, emphasizing description and elaboration without providing arguments.”²⁹¹ The feminine style of his mother’s narrative draws people in, creating affects to make listeners “sigh, sing and weep” with her,²⁹² and the masculine style of his father’s narrative makes the listeners forget their own existence—drawn into the stories themselves, they become “neither dead nor alive, [in] a state of

²⁸⁹Zien Cui, *Bei dou you 7 xing* (Guangzhou: Hua cheng chu ban she, 2012).

²⁹⁰ Cui Zi’en, *Baidouyouchixin* (北斗有七星), p. 103. (all translations are mine if not specified.)

²⁹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 103.

²⁹² *Ibid.*, p. 103.

‘nonexistence’.”²⁹³ Cui’s own choice of narrative voice dances between these two gendered styles. On the one hand, he recounts memories from the past, evoking emotions and sentiments for his readers to relate; on the other, his third-person perspective creates a sobering distance, making his readers witness his family members’ lives unfolding in front of them like a tapestry. As the narrator, he often adopts a meta-narrative position at the end of many of the stories, commenting on the events as if he is an outsider witnessing the happening from afar. For example, in wrapping up the vignettes about his father’s life, he distances himself from the stories, offering a bird’s eye view comment: “before he passes away, Tianxian tells me, he is pretty satisfied with his life. I see a sense of transcendence in that satisfaction; a kind of transcendence you can only see at one’s end of life that uplifts one from memories of events and people from home. This is a radical transformation of heaven and earth; this is like entering heaven.”²⁹⁴

From the quote above, we can see that it is Cui’s firm belief in Catholicism that endows him with this sense of the transcendental. Nonetheless, it is also his religious belief that creates tension between him and his family, due to his sexuality. Unlike Chen’s overtly queering of the family romance in *Taipei Dad, New York Mom*, however, Cui’s writing on his family does not foreground his sexuality; rather, it is through his religious belief in human compassion that he resolves this tension and highlights this religious love as the main theme. It is his religious belief that enables him to seek a kind of human compassion that is beyond all social and sexual differences. In concluding how

²⁹³ Ibid., p. 103.

²⁹⁴ Ibid., p. 151.

his parents' teaching influences him and his siblings, he tells us, "Jingmei and Tianxian's frugality and pragmatism provide us with useful nutrition. Either during our childhood or adulthood, we never had the slightest trait of materialism. We never had avarice for material or money. The unconditional love among families is above everything."²⁹⁵

In Chen's narrative, the bifurcated gendered power dynamic between his father and mother sets the stage for the conventional meaning of home to disintegrate, leading to alternative kinship formations to emerge in the final "homeless" moment. Cui's queer intervention to the question of normative kinship in this piece, however, interestingly bypasses the "destructive" path that we see in his early films; his attempt to go beyond the normativity of kinship, in this book, is through religious transcendence, as his final sections on dying indicate.

Entitled, "Stars falling," this section on his family members' deaths is depicted as the process of a natural course of things. He describes his father's passing away as a religious passage to eternity: "At night, surrounded by candle lights, we lie right next to each other on a small bed. What I feel at this moment is his life, eternal life but not annihilation. Maybe he reveals the secret of the heavenly kingdom to me in such a silent way. No wonder my heart is moved with warmth and pulsation. There is no sadness."²⁹⁶ By framing his father's final moment as part of the natural course of the universe, Cui's religious inclination enables him to overcome the traumas and pain in the human world of suffering, infusing a sense of bliss that runs through all of his accounts of his family's

²⁹⁵ Ibid., 239.

²⁹⁶ Ibid., 250.

lives in this writing. It is in this sense of a natural course of action that Cui connects the original ties of kinship with alternative forms of queer intimacy. After the ritual of mass that is held for his father's funeral, he tells us how the kinship system in his home took a queer turn: "After Tianxian passes away and mom departs, I encountered a 18 year old boy on street. Thereafter, he entered my home, becoming part of my family without a thought of leaving me. Tianxian passed away in spring. In Autumn, God sends another family member to me, giving me the intimacy I need in this floating world."²⁹⁷ Cui's queerness does not challenge the normative power of the kinship system. He deploys the indiscriminatory love of God, or the transcendent, to level out the power differentials among human relationships. From the father to a random stranger on the street, Cui expands the horizon of kinship intimacy to a boundless sea of human compassion.

The melodramatic feelings in Chen's *Taipei Dad, New York Mom* are purposefully produced affects to deterritorialize the model of the nuclear family that is promoted by the developing neoliberal state of Taiwan. Chen's task of homecoming in his family writing is depicted as the return of the spectral, or the unrepresentable, a process that eventually becomes political in the act of re-territorializing "home." The final moment of glamorized "homelessness" further indexes an ongoing deterritorialization of any stable state of belonging. Such a radical deconstruction of home is in line with Deleuze and Guattari's politics of affective becoming—the political axiology in their *Anti-Oedipus*, which is defined by Nick Land as follows: "always decode...believe nothing, and extinguish all nostalgia for belonging. Ask always where capital is most inhuman,

²⁹⁷ Ibid., p. 258.

unsentimental and out of control. Abandon all attachment to the state.”²⁹⁸

If we situate Cui’s works in the historical condition of post-Socialist China, we observe a similar deterritorializing intent in his *Broken Ethics Trilogy* with regard to the new formation of the nuclear family in China. Nevertheless, his unique belief in Catholicism restores a sense of nostalgia for transcendental belonging, an ultimate realm of eternity where all human differences are incorporated. I observe an unresolved tension between deconstruction and transcendence in Cui’s early and later works. A tension interestingly on the one hand exposes the hidden social contradictions in post-Socialist era; on the other, it seems to even out the contradictions with the religious transcendence stemming from his personal religious belief. Maybe it is with this tension that we can seek the radicalness of Cui’s intervention in the rising social contradiction of post-Socialist China. With the all encompassing power of indiscriminatory divine love, the quotidian domestic and the monstrous profane can both co-exist without being resolved in the natural course of the universe.

²⁹⁸ Nick Land, “Making it with death: remarks on Thanatos and Desiring-Production,” in *Journal of the British Society for Phenomenology*, vol. 24, no. 1, pp. 66-76, p. 67.

CONCLUSION

The Iron House and Golden Cangue of Chineseness

To conclude, I evoke two famous images in the history of modern Chinese literature—Lu Xun’s figure of the “iron house” from the introduction of *Snarl* and Eileen Chang’s “golden cangue” from her work of fiction, *The Golden Cangue*. Now both canonical literary figures, Lu and Chang respectively represent the pinnacles of male and female writing in modern Chinese literature, and are each famous for their critical depictions of traditional Chinese culture. The image of the iron house appears in Lu’s first collected anthology of essays, *Nahan* (“Snarl”), in which he describes China as a huge iron house in which everyone is sleeping, with no awareness of the looming catastrophe outside of the house. He compares himself to one of the few who gets to awake from this collective slumbering, a lonely, sage man who is caught in the dilemma of whether to wake others. If he decides to awaken the others, he realizes that he will have no solution for them to break out of the iron house. Given this situation, he feels that it would be better if he spares them the pain of waking reality, allowing them to die instead in peaceful slumber. In this famous passage, the iron house is obviously symbolic of traditional Chinese culture; in Lu’s depiction, it becomes the impenetrable walls that keep his fellow Chinese men from getting in touch with the new reality. Similarly, the golden cangue in Eileen Chang’s fiction represents the old Chinese feudalistic familialism, in which women are caught up in a strictly hierarchized kinship system that is at the service of the Confucian patriarchy. As she tells the story of Cao Qiqiao’s

dehumanizing process of climbing up the kinship ladder, the golden cangue symbolizes the double-edged sword that a married woman in this system aspires to acquire. It symbolizes the matriarchal position that a woman who is thrown into the Confucian kinship structure can only aspire to get, a seemingly promising kinship position with power but actually demands the woman's complicity with the system. With its illustrious glow, it lures Cao to obtain its symbolic power as she becomes the matriarch in the system. Nevertheless, in this process of acquisition, Cao unwittingly subjects herself to the dehumanizing power mechanism of this system; with the acquisition of the golden cangue, in Eileen Chang's words, she slays herself as well as others.

Both the images of the iron house and the golden cangue, as their symbolic meanings in the original texts indicate, appropriately express a modern Chinese subject's century-long struggle with the establishment of traditional Chinese culture. The solid and illustrious metal qualities of both images vividly depict the love-hate relationship between a modern Chinese subject and his/her cultural roots. Traditional Chinese culture, as both images represent, is supposed to safeguard its subjects within the iron walls, or grant them a sense of pride or worth, as the golden cangue suggests. Regardless of its seemingly positive qualities, however, such a figure either stifles, as the image of the iron house shows, or slays, as the image of the golden gang demonstrates, its people.

With these iconic images of the iron house and the golden cangue, I return to the running theme of this dissertation—the making and unmaking of home and family in 20th and 21st century Chinese queer cultural expressions. Home or family, as tropes for the

locus of traditional Chinese culture in 20th and 21st Chinese literature, theatre, and film, are often depicted with a strong tinge of sentimental or melodramatic aesthetics. As the images of the iron house and the golden cangue express, the familial site becomes a paradoxical place to which a Chinese subject, on the one hand, attaches, and, on the other, out of which he or she attempts to break in the course of becoming modern. The deconstruction and reconstruction of Confucian familialism thus becomes an important theme in representations of family saga or drama in 20th and 21st Chinese culture. The emotional trials and tribulations that attract the Chinese readers/audience to those family dramas, as my analysis throughout the dissertation indicates, capitalizes on such a psychic mechanism of a “Westernized but non-Western” Chinese subject, to use once again Rey Chow’s words. The affective force generated out of these sentimental or melodramatic modes of narrating the family drama, therefore, must not be taken lightly. It is exactly with these moments of affective excess that the (de)constructions of familial order and the reanchorings of a modern Chinese subject are made possible. As the images of the iron house and the golden cangue suggest an affective ambivalence, familial imaginations in modern China are always caught up in the emotional pulls between attachment and deviation.

The Queer in the Family

It is with these affective tensions within the changing contours of familial

imaginations that I have situated the emergences of queerness in 20th and 21st century China. Queerness emerges at the historical moments when the imaginaries of China are destabilized, that is, as different waves of familial imaginations surge to re-construct Chinese familialism, which can also paradoxically further help to anchor a modern Chinese subject. It is at the interstices of these different cultural attempts to restablize the contours of Chineseness that queerness arises, either as an ongoing force to disrupt the melodramatic or sentimental tendency towards the rebuilding of familialism, or as a mode of different ethical relations to others. The iron house and the golden cage, as paradoxical images of home/tradition, are thus the conditions of possibility for Chinese queerness to emerge. Nevertheless, Chinese queerness does not adopt an oppositional position to the iron house or the golden cage. Chinese queerness plays along with the ambivalent feelings associated with them in order to keep the definitional contours of Chineseness open. This has been shown through my study of the emergences of Chinese queerness throughout the 20th and 21st centuries.

During the Republican era, a major epistemic shift in modern Chinese history, Ouyang Yuqian experiments with the meaning of being a modern woman with his theatrical impersonations. In the midst of the restructuring of the sexual system, when the kinship-based Confucian familial gender system is gradually replaced with a personhood-based liberalist gender/sex system, Ouyang's female impersonation exceeds the familial ideologies of 1910s Shanghai family dramas and 1920s Nora plays. His embodied experience of becoming the gendered other enables him to go beyond the

masculinist ideology behind the New Woman movement, leading him to create Nora images that harbor queer desires. The space for queer desire nonetheless shrinks after the 1930s, when international political turmoil brings about the tightening of political controls and managements of sexuality. It is not until the end of the Cold War that we see queer desires resurface to the horizon of history in the larger Chinese world, and, with the spread of the international queer rights movement, they further become identified as queer subject positions fighting for political recognition.

This has led me to my second and third chapters, where I have detailed the emergences of self-consciously queer fictional, theatrical, and cinematic texts since the 1980s in Taiwan and the 1990s in China. Once again, it is when the definitional contours of Chineseness are opened up, that is, as the respective regimes—the Chinese Nationalists in Taiwan and the Socialists in China—gradually lose their ideological controls over cultural narratives in the post-Cold War historical condition, that family narratives in fiction, theatre, and film emerge again to redefine the proper meanings of Chineseness. I have thus situated these first queer texts in the larger cultural landscape of familial renarrativizations. As my analyses of *Crystal Boys*, Tian's *East Palace*, *West Palace*, and Lin's adaptation of Jean Genet show, these queer articulations, rather than contributing to mainstream family drama's melodramatic or sentimental intention of reconstructing familialism, either suggest an alternative ethical mode of radical alterity, as the case studies from Taiwan indicate, or perpetuate an anti-normative impulse against ideological closures, as the examples from Mainland China show.

Lastly, with my case studies of Mickey Chen from Taiwan and Cui Zi'en from China, I have shown two contemporary examples of how queer interventions continue to disrupt the spectres of Confucian familialism, as resurrected in post-Martial Law Taiwan's and post-Socialist China's models of the nuclear family, respectively. With a Deleuzian notion of affect, I demonstrate how Chen's and Cui's queer aesthetics capitalize on the sentimentalism of mainstream ideology, yet only to produce queer affects to change and transvalue the familial ideology within the neoliberalist nuclear family.

If the family is what holds the ethico-political order together in pre-modern China, then the transformation of the familial order is certainly one of the most important political agendas in 20th and 21st China. The images of the iron house and the golden cage have demonstrated to us the ongoing pull between the construction and the deconstruction of the familial space in China's narratives about home in the modern era. Chinese queerness emerges through the interstices of this pull. It erupts as affective forces that perpetuate the openness of the contours of orthodox Chineseness.

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